

Refuge & Hope in the Time of ISIS:

The Urgent Need for Protection, Humanitarian Support,
and Durable Solutions in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece

January 2015



A Report of the Migration and Refugee Services of the
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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Cover Photo: *Some 1.6 million children are fleeing from Syria and are seeking refuge in neighboring countries.
Turkey generously hosts nearly half of those children. Photo by Russell Chapman.*
(<http://russellchapman.wordpress.com/2014/12/14/syria-interesting-developments/>)

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“In the face of the ongoing and overwhelming violence, I strongly renew my appeal for peace.”

“[At the same time] the church feels called to give its humble, yet concrete and sincere witness to the charity it has learned from Christ, the good Samaritan.”

—Pope Francis to Catholic humanitarian groups about the Syria crisis

“[The] Church will remain at your side and will continue to hold up your cause before the world.”

—Pope Francis speaking to refugees in Istanbul, Turkey



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Migration and Refugee Services
3211 4th Street NE • Washington, DC 20017-1194 •
(p) 202-541- 3352 • (f) 202-541-3399
Website: www.usccb.org/mrs

January 31, 2015

Dear Refugees and All Coming to Your Aid,

My sisters and brothers who are seeking refuge in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece, I greet you on behalf of my fellow Bishops, the U.S. Catholic community, and the delegation of the Committee on Migration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops that recently visited you. You are people of all faiths. We recognize our common, human dignity and come to you as fellow children of God.

We are moved by your great suffering, your loss of home and family and country, and your urgent need for protection, humanitarian care, and the resolution of your refugee situation. We are likewise moved by your continued hope, patience, and resilience as you seek refuge and struggle to build meaningful new lives. We write this report as an expression of solidarity with you and your families, and as a pledge to continue working for peace and advocating and collaborating with others to help you meet your needs and reach your aspirations.

We also write to express and pledge our solidarity and support to all of you in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece who are welcoming these refugees who are fleeing from Syria and Iraq and other countries.

We are disturbed by the sharp increase in religious persecution in Syria and Iraq. Religious extremists have killed thousands of Christians and forced tens of thousands of you to flee for your lives and faith, threatening the very existence of the ancient Christian communities in your countries. We are mindful that hundreds of thousands of you of different religions and ethnicities have fled from the same extremism. We continue to call upon President Obama and other concerned world leaders to use the United Nations and other international mechanisms to end violence and build peace and an inclusive society in Syria and Iraq, building toward a future that would enable safe, dignified voluntary return, including for Christians and other ethnic and religious minorities. We also advocate for alternative durable solutions, such as resettlement, for those who need immediate relief or for whom such return would not be safe and humane. For those who are internally displaced in Syria and Iraq, we call for expanded protection and humanitarian support.

This report was prepared at the direction of the USCCB Committee on Migration by the staff members of the committee who traveled to Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece from September 19 to October 4, 2014. With this report, we make an urgent appeal to you, the leaders of the United States, nations of the European Union, and other concerned nations that have already been coming to the aid of these vulnerable refugees. These deserving refugees and host countries are in crisis. We urge you to work together to assure full funding for protection, humanitarian care, and pursuit of durable solutions for these refugees, and to assure that the international community is fairly sharing the host countries' humanitarian burden.

May God continue to bless all of you who are seeking refuge with dignity and hope. And may God strengthen and guide us all as we work together for a more peaceful and humane world.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S.
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle
Chair, Committee on Migration
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Overview

Purpose and objectives of the assessment trip. A delegation from the Committee on Migration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (hereafter referred to as the “Committee on Migration”) travelled to Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece from September 19 to October 4, 2014, to assess the impact in those countries of the growing humanitarian refugee crisis caused by the Syrian conflict. The Committee on Migration chose the three countries because they host large numbers of Syrians. They host other vulnerable refugee groups that have been overshadowed by the large number of Syrians (e.g., Iraqis, Afghans, Congolese, Somalis, Eritreans, Sudanese, and others). They are also border countries that serve as gateways for migration to the European Union (EU) and the West. In Turkey, the delegation went to the southeastern cities of Gaziantep, Kilis, Sanliurfa, to the cosmopolitan city of Istanbul, and to the capital city Ankara; in Bulgaria, to the small border towns of Lyubimets and Harmanli, and to the capital Sofia; and in Greece, to Samos Island near Turkey’s west coast, and to the teeming capital of Athens.

The delegation met with many Syrians seeking refuge and with people from the other nationalities mentioned above. They included asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking, torture, trauma, gender-based violence, and religious persecution. There were at-risk women, unaccompanied children and other at-risk children, including those exploited for child labor in the textile, clothing, or sex industries, girls forced to marry and boys at risk of forcible recruitment by extremists. They also met with those in each country who are providing protection and humanitarian assistance. These included government officials, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), U.S. Embassies, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Catholic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and leaders, and other NGOs. The objectives were to express solidarity with those seeking refuge, to strengthen partnerships with Catholic migration ministries, to better understand from all stakeholders the challenges and possible solutions related to protection, humanitarian needs, and durable solutions for those seeking refuge, and to speak out for our sisters and brothers in need. This report is based on the trip, extensive follow-up as of December 16, 2014, and some additional statistics as of January 25, 2015.

Syrians are fleeing to Turkey with the clothes on their backs, the small bags they can carry, and the children in tow. Photo by IMPR Humanitarian.



A summary of the report. The delegation’s enumerated findings throughout the report will reveal some serious challenges that Syrians and non-Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece face related to their protection, humanitarian needs, and pursuit of durable solutions. The findings also enumerate the burdens that the large refugee flows cause for the three host countries, detail the host nations’ efforts to address their international protection responsibilities, and identify some gaps that still remain. As the country that has taken in the largest number of refugees in the region, Turkey has generously stepped up to meet many challenges. However, it has taken on a disproportionate burden as the enormous refugee flow overwhelms its registration and service delivery systems. Bulgaria and Greece have strengthened their refugee protection capacities, but major gaps still exist related to refugees’ access to protection and integration. These gaps interfere with the two nations’ efforts to provide their own refugee protection and their potential role in facilitating durable solutions outside the region. The recommendations at the end of each section detail policy and program responses that the host countries might find useful for filling remaining gaps and meeting the needs of those seeking refuge. The recommendations detail programmatic and financial support that donor countries can provide to share the humanitarian burden with host countries. They also detail ways that Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece can work with UNHCR, with the European Union (EU) and the United States, and with other asylum and resettlement countries so that these refugees also receive refugee protection outside of the region in a more humane and orderly manner. The recommendations often build on positive policies and practices already used by the host countries or NGOs working in the countries. These are detailed in the “Signs of Hope” subsections.



Many Syrian children have suffered or witnessed trauma and then face a difficult, uncertain journey seeking refuge, most with their families, some alone. Photo by IMPR Humanitarian.

I. As the crisis expands tenfold in Turkey, people seeking refuge suffer the consequences and so does Turkey

GENERAL FINDINGS

The escalating Syrian conflict has created one of the worst refugee crises of our generation.¹ When a Committee on Migration delegation previously travelled to Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey in October 2012, some 550,000 people had fled from Syria's 18-month old conflict. According to UNHCR with Syria now in its fourth year of conflict that number exceeds 3.8 million. Syrians now make up the world's largest refugee population after the Palestinians. Half of Syrian refugees are children. Over 85% live outside of refugee camps in towns and villages of the host countries. Besides producing high numbers of refugees, Syria has some 7.6 million internally displaced people (IDP) and Iraq an estimated 1.9 million. An estimated 191,369 Syrians have been killed in the conflict. See the Appendix at the end of the report for more background.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has further worsened and expanded the crisis to involve Iraqis and growing numbers of ethnic and religious minorities.² During the first several days of the Committee on Migration's assessment trip, over 130,000 Kurdish Syrians from Kobane and surrounding villages in northern Syria were forced by ISIS to flee into Turkey. Besides illustrating the escalating forced migration from Syria, the large influx of this ethnic minority illustrates the growing complexity of the conflict. It began as the Syrian government's response to Syrian political protestors and shortly thereafter became an armed conflict between the government and the fractured Syrian armed opposition. Some of the opposition was supported and some of it condemned by the United States and other Western powers. In April 2013, extremists from Syria and Iraq coalesced to form the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (also sometimes known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and the Islamic State (IS)). In June 2014, ISIS signaled broader ambitions by announcing a self-proclaimed, worldwide Islamic state or "caliphate." In August 2014, the UN Human Rights Council condemned the widespread war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the conflict

“The condition of refugees is bad. We feel weak. No one is hurting us right now, but we are upset and don't understand why we are here. But at least we are safe in Turkey...”

“What is my prayer to God? Keep us safe. Give us kind and gentle neighbors. Give us patience.”

—A Syrian refugee mother with her family in southeastern Turkey



Whole villages of Iraqis have been forcibly displaced by recent ISIS attacks. Iraq has some 1.9 million internally displaced people, including many elderly and children. Photo by CRS.

by both the Syrian government and by extremists such as ISIS. Besides Syrians, ISIS is also terrorizing Iraqi Christians and Iraqi Yazidis. The delegation met Syrians and Iraqis fleeing religious and ethnic persecution throughout the trip.

With the escalating conflict, there is an expanding international humanitarian crisis for those fleeing and an overwhelming burden on neighboring refugee host countries such as Turkey.³ When a Committee on Migration delegation visited the region two years ago, Turkey was hosting 150,000 Syrians with 80% of them living in 12 refugee camps. Now Turkey, a nation of some 81 million people with a land area the size of Texas, hosts some 1.6 million Syrians, about half of all Syrian refugees in the region. Now over 84% of Syrians in Turkey live as urban refugees and can be seen in almost all parts of Turkey. Over one million are registered and an estimated 230,000 of them live in 22 camps along the Syrian border. The other 847,000 registered Syrians live in Turkish towns and cities. The remaining 600,000 Syrians who are unregistered are added to Turkey's urban refugee population. Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) has been deeply involved in responding to Syrian refugees. Amidst the crisis, Turkey has also created a new agency, the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) that has begun to implement a new migration law, Law on Foreigners and International Protection. (See Durable Solution Findings).

Besides over 1.6 million Syrians in Turkey, there are over 167,000 people of other nationalities who are in need of international protection. This includes, according to UNHCR, at least 103,000 registered Iraqis, some 36,260 Afghans, 10,250 Iranians, and some 17,890 various others, including sizeable numbers of Africans, such as Congolese, Somalis, and Eritreans. An estimated 47,000 of the over 167,000 needing protection are registered with the Turkish government and assigned to an estimated 75 Turkish cities, known as satellite cities. Many of these registered non-Syrians are at various stages of refugee resettlement to third countries. However, unregistered non-Syrians live even more in the margins of Turkish society and are often at greater risk than unregistered Syrians.

Turkey bears a disproportionate share of responding to the Syrian refugee crisis.⁴ Despite great political and financial costs, Turkey continues to welcome Syrians and provide them with temporary refuge. Turkey has reportedly spent some \$4 billion to serve the needs of the Syrian refugees. Nonetheless, UNHCR reports that international protection and humanitarian needs in Turkey are funded at only a 29% level. There is a growing lack of protection, livelihood, housing, education, health care, and food for the refugees, especially for those in urban refugee settings who are unregistered or who are recent arrivals from Syria and Iraq. There is also a growing burden on the host community. Initially, Turkey chose to go it alone to meet this burden and resisted international support in the usual form of assistance delivered through international NGOs. Now Turkey is demonstrating a growing openness to collaboration as shown by its recent registration of over 20 NGOs. (See Signs of Hope.) As detailed below, the delegation found that there are grave consequences for those seeking refuge and for the host countries and potentially for the stability of the region itself if sufficient funding is not provided.

PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN FINDINGS

UNHCR's systems and Turkey's government service systems are overwhelmed. This includes systems through which Turkey and its implementing partner, UNHCR, would ordinarily conduct refugee registration, protection and humanitarian needs assessment, distribution of basic necessities, and other humanitarian outreach. The system overload has been a barrier for some Syrians and non-Syrians to register. Being unregistered reduces their access to protection by the state and their access to basic government services. For those who are registered, even though their registration and/or status theoretically gives many of them a right to basic services, Turkey does not have the capacity to fully provide all the basic services. Also, Turkey's own education, health, and social service systems are overwhelmed, especially by the 1.4 million Syrians living in urban refugee situations. Most Syrian urban refugees live in the 12 southeastern Turkish provinces bordering Syria in cities such as Gaziantep, Kilis, and Sanliurfa. Many such city populations in the region have increased by 10% or more due to the refugee influx. In Istanbul, the number of people seeking refuge has likewise greatly increased to an estimated 330,000. Meanwhile, Turkey has not had time or resources to expand community infrastructure or adapt it to such non-native population increases.

UNHCR reports that the international community has donated only 29% of the international funding needed to meet the refugee crisis in Turkey.

—Syria Regional Response Plan, 5 December 2014

Over a third of those seeking refuge in Turkey have not registered or applied for international protection and that points to a lack of capacity in Turkey's registration system but also, for some, a lack of confidence or understanding of the protection system. Turkey requires foreigners seeking international protection to register with the government. An estimated one third of the Syrians in Turkey are not registered. Many people of other nationalities seeking refuge, such as Iraqis and Afghans, are also unregistered. As mentioned above, some have not registered because the government system is overloaded. Iraqis who were applying for conditional refugee status during the time of the assessment trip, for example, were receiving a pre-registration interview date in 2022. Others expressed reservations or fears about registering. With the implementation of the new law being in transition, people are sometimes unclear about the status for which they qualify. Some Syrians reportedly are not pursuing government assistance either because they already established themselves in Turkey prior to the conflict or they plan to seek refuge beyond Turkey.

The overloaded systems mean that some of the most vulnerable, including unaccompanied minors, fall through the cracks. With the overload, there has not been a concerted effort to identify the most vulnerable refugees, to do short-term protection and humanitarian interventions for them, and to pursue durable solutions for those at immediate risk. This puts the most vulnerable, such as unaccompanied children, at great risk of being unidentified and underserved. Advocates in Turkey were not aware of viable mechanisms in place for NGOs or others to refer pregnant, unaccompanied girls for immediate protection or pursuit of a durable solution. The next two findings provide further examples the delegation saw of protection problems for at-risk children and women.

Many at-risk children, including unaccompanied children in urban areas, are in exploitative labor situations. In the delegation's meeting with the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers (ASAM), one of the main NGO implementing partners with Turkey for pre-registering, screening, and serving refugees, ASAM summarized their findings from a survey of their large Syrian caseload in Istanbul (40% response rate). They found at least one child working in each household. The Committee on Migration delegation found the same result in the Syrian focus groups conducted in Istanbul. The youngest employed child encountered was a 7-year old boy selling water outside the company in which his older 10-year old brother was employed. Parents allow their children to work as a family survival strategy, especially to keep food on the table and pay rent.

Most of the children work in Istanbul's textile industry, including both large companies and small tailor shops. Others worked at shoe making, shoe repair, and construction. The children work 10-12 hour days in often poor conditions. Adult refugees working in the irregular economy are paid 450 Turkish Lira (TL) per month which is half of the Turkish minimum wage of 900 TL per month. Refugee children generally earn half of the half, or 225 TL/month, although youth who are 15-17 years of age earn sometimes earn 300-400 TL per month. Some children earn as little as 1 TL per day. Unaccompanied Afghan boys later interviewed in Greece reported working in butcher shops when they lived in Turkey, and a former Afghan youth said that Afghan boys were often victims of sex trafficking.

At-risk women and girls seeking refuge in Turkey are too often faced with early marriage, "bride selling," and survival sex. Photo by IMPR Humanitarian.



Women and girls are being subjected to early marriage, “bride selling,” and survival sex. “Bride selling” of young Syrian refugee women and girls is reportedly a serious problem. Although some of them will end up in legitimate marriages, many are entering temporary, so-called “religious marriages.” These were described in an interview as “a form of trafficking.” The men use the females and discard them after a short period of time – disgraced and shamed. Some then become sex workers to survive. The delegation was informed that brothels have been set up in southeastern Turkey consisting solely of Syrian refugee females. Many of those put to work as prostitutes are “young Syrian girls from Istanbul.” Thus far, there has been reportedly no action by the police to close down the brothels or prosecute the owners. Those trying to escape have few options. Victims of human trafficking are underreported in Turkey, especially those who are at-risk women and children from refugee populations, as described in this section⁵ The delegation is hopeful that the full implementation of Turkey’s new migration law will help to address these trafficking concerns.

Due to the lack of rights information, some people seeking refuge are not pursuing or receiving protections and services for which the law provides. Turkey began to implement its new law on migration on April 4, 2014, but it is not yet fully implemented.⁶ Also, with the expanding and protracted nature of the Syrian crisis, the policy deliberations have been ongoing, shifting and highly complex. During this time of crisis and legal transition, some Syrians and non-Syrians seeking refuge said they did not understand the protections and benefits due them under the law. The government agencies providing the protections and benefits also reportedly sometimes did not have full, up-to-date information. NGO staff said that they spend considerable time intervening with clinics and hospitals trying to help gain access to services for people seeking refuge who have been mistakenly denied them. They said that refugees and those who serve them would greatly benefit from up to date and accurate rights and benefits information.

Lack of livelihood for people seeking refuge reduces their access to protection, housing, and education. For some, their lack of livelihood is an obstacle to even securing protected status. One Congolese photojournalist, for example, told the delegation he wanted to apply for refugee status, but he did not have enough money to take the bus to Ankara where everyone must go to apply. For others, such as Syrians, they are falling deeper into poverty despite having protected status. UNHCR reports a growing number of “destitute” Syrian families in Turkey. Many of the hundreds of thousands of middle class Syrians who fled to Turkey have by now spent their savings and liquidated their resources. Also, many of the people seeking refuge in Turkey, especially the newly arrived and unregistered people, lack permission from the government to work. They are thus unable to work in the regular economy. Instead, they work in the irregular economy doing construction, working in restaurants, recycling materials, or salvaging saleable items from waste dumps. Adults who work irregularly reportedly receive about 450 TL per month, about one half the minimum wage.

As described above, many families are turning as a last resort to sending their children to work at one fourth the minimum wage in order to earn enough money for the family to survive. Also, multiple families often group together to share housing and living expenses. The delegation visited several houses in southeastern Turkey and apartments in Istanbul shared by multiple families comprising 18 to 25 people. Three Syrian families shared a house in Urfa. (A fourth family had been staying with them but recently decided to move on.) Two young men in the family had serious war-related medical issues that left them both bed-ridden. An outreach worker visited occasionally from the recently opened community center in their city. They are surviving on 900TL/month of combined earnings by two men in the family who work as barbers. In Istanbul, the delegation visited an apartment shared by 25 Afghan refugees. They also visited a one-bedroom apartment of a family that included a mother, 12 and 14 year old daughters, and a disabled, 8 year old boy. Both girls used to support the family working 12 hour days, 5 ½ days per week in the textile industry. Since the 12 year old developed leg pains, the family now survives on only the earnings of the 14 year old.

There is an extremely serious lack of formal education, especially for Syrian children in urban settings and for non-Syrian children.⁷ Turkey is faced with providing schools for 500,000 to 700,000 Syrian children and tens of thousands of children of other nationalities, as well. An estimated 14% of refugees live in camps, and some 80% of their children attend school. This includes mostly Syrian children, but also reportedly some Iraqis attend schools in camps in Mardin, Midyat, and Nusaybin. Regarding the 86% of the refugee population who live outside of camps, only an estimated 25-30% of Syrian children attend school. Only an estimated 14% living in Istanbul attend school. Some Syrian children are in their fourth year without school.

There are several reasons why so few refugee children attend school. The language in schools is Turkish and few Syrian or other refugee children speak Turkish. There are not enough public classrooms, books, and teachers. Transportation to school is often a challenge. As noted above, the lack of livelihood is an obstacle to education for many children since they must work to support themselves or their families and have no time to attend school. Lack of registration and status is also a barrier since an undocumented child is generally allowed to stay in a public school for only 45 days.

Some interviewed felt that there was an “uneven treatment” regarding education between non-Syrians and Syrians. Two Afghan families in Istanbul said the schools would not allow them to enroll their children. Advocates reported that an estimated 15% of school-aged Iraqi children in Turkey attend school. For the Iraqis, this may be due, at least in part, to legal barriers. According to UNHCR, Turkey allows Iraqi children who entered Turkey before May 2014 to have access to school. Iraqis who entered afterwards do not yet have full access, since their status has not yet been determined. For educational and other reasons, some advocates are urging Turkey to grant temporary protective status to Iraqis.

At present, Turkey, with support from the international community, is expanding its education capacity. United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), one of its implementing partners, has built 13 refugee schools for Syrian children throughout Turkey of which eight are in camps and five are in local communities. They are pre-fabricated schools, and their funders include the U.S. Department of State. UNICEF also supports host communities to run second shifts for refugee children, such as in the satellite city of Kayseri. Turkey will partner with IOM in some locations to bus Syrian children to the refugee schools to overcome transportation challenges. The No Lost Generation Strategy, a collaborative effort by UNICEF, UNHCR, major NGOs, host countries, and donors such as the United States, focuses especially on education and psycho-social care for refugee and local children impacted by the Syrian crisis. While these are all welcome developments, the need is much larger than can be addressed by these efforts so far.

Access to education is refugee children’s #1 need in Turkey. These refugee students are among the 25-30% living outside of refugee camps that attend school. Photo by the delegation.



Many of those seeking refuge in Turkey directly experienced or witnessed trauma in their home countries or in transit and are in need of psycho-social support. Refugee community center staff reported widespread responses to trauma among children such as sleeping and eating disorders, nightmares, bed-wetting, fear of loud noises, social isolation and others. Their parents are likewise traumatized and sometimes not in a position to parent their children. A rise in family dysfunction, including domestic violence, is one of the consequences. The challenge is compounded because for Syrians, especially for Syrian men, counseling and mental health therapy carry stigma. Given such obstacles, staff observed that the community center itself plays an important role in people's healing by providing a gathering place to process the trauma of their journeys and support one another as they plan their futures. They also noted the importance of "child friendly spaces" where children can be children away from the stress and drama of the daily crises. These spaces serve as not only a place to play but an important means of supporting the children's mental health, healing, and resilience. The delegation had the opportunity to visit a child friendly space run by NGOs in Kilis, in southeastern Turkey.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS

Turkey strengthens its legal framework for two durable solutions for refugees and for complementary forms of protection with the Law on Foreigners and International Relations Act, but maintains a geographical limitation that strictly limits permanent integration for refugees in Turkey.⁸ There are three traditional durable solutions, that is, mechanisms for permanently resolving the refugee situation for individuals seeking refuge. They are resettlement to a third country, voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity back to one's home country, and permanent integration into the host community. Pursuant to its new law, Turkey facilitates refugee resettlement to a third country for those to whom it grants "conditional refugee" status. It also supports voluntary repatriation. It likewise provides non-permanent international protections under the new law including subsidiary protection for those fleeing the death penalty, torture, or generalized violence or armed conflict, and temporary protection for those who are forced to leave their country as part of a mass influx to Turkey. But by maintaining the European geographical limitation that was part of the original post-World War II 1951 Refugee Convention, Turkey strictly limits permanent refugee integration in Turkey to people fleeing from [persecution] "events in Europe." Many refugee advocates urge Turkey to let go of its geographical limitation and to thereby add the full version of permanent integration in Turkey as a third durable solution option.

The Syrian refugee crisis has become a protracted one in which the durable solution of voluntary return will not be possible for at least several more years. With the escalation and expansion of the Syrian crisis described in the opening paragraphs of this section, peace appears to be even farther into the future. Since Turkey currently hosts the largest number of Syrians, it faces many challenges, which are also challenges for the international community. These include filling the protection and humanitarian gaps described above and maintaining that enhanced protection and humanitarian care for at least several more years until voluntary repatriation may become possible. Even for those being resettled, the time period is currently about 500 days of processing in Turkey for the majority of the applicants. It will be important to achieve a decent ongoing quality of life for those hoping for resettlement and for a longer period for those waiting for voluntary repatriation. One likely consequence of deteriorating circumstances for those seeking refuge in Turkey could be growing onward, irregular migration. Surveys still indicate that the vast majority of registered Syrians plan to stay in Turkey and pursue voluntary return to Syria.⁹ It will be important to continue monitoring the durable solution plans of Syrians in Turkey, including the 600,000 unregistered Syrians. Moreover, it is crucial for not only Turkey to maintain its protection space but for the other refugee host countries neighboring Syria, as well, countries such as Lebanon, where UNHCR reports that one in four people are refugees.¹⁰

Syrian and Iraqi Christians and other religious minorities are especially in need of safe and humane space in Turkey while they pursue durable solutions. Laying the groundwork for eventual return is even more of a challenge than it was when the delegation of the Committee on Migration visited Turkey two years ago. Today, many more Syrian and Iraqi Christians, Iraqi Yazidis, and other religious minorities, are fleeing for their lives from religious persecution. The Committee on Migration continues to support and work for policies, practices, and peace efforts that could make safe and dignified voluntary return possible in the future. The Committee on Migration also supports other efforts

to secure durable solutions for religious and ethnic minorities that have suffered or witnessed horrific violence or otherwise have discerned that eventual voluntary return is not a viable, safe, and humane option for them to pursue. In either case, it is important to assure ongoing safe and welcoming space in Turkey for religious minorities seeking refuge as they pursue their various durable solutions.

There are processing challenges for third country resettlement that arise as Turkey implements a new law and launches a new migration agency. UNHCR has indicated that they would like to refer 10,000 Syrians from Turkey for third country resettlement in 2015 (with 6,000-7,000 coming to the United States). A challenge to such increased resettlement is that Turkey is implementing its new law and launching its new agency, the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM). It appears that the government of Turkey would like the DGMM to be responsible for making referrals for resettlement. This would be out of the realm of the role of the host government in most refugee situations throughout the world, and would be an extremely difficult task for a new agency to assume. Some observers have suggested that UNHCR and the international community should help Turkey address this transitional challenge in some direct ways including maintaining the role of UNHCR in the referral process to help assure that resettlement processing continues at a timely pace. This would help both vulnerable refugees but also would help facilitate sharing Turkey's humanitarian burden in a timely way.

SIGNS OF HOPE

Through the strategic use of existing resources, some NGOs have shown the feasibility of building mechanisms to increase access to resettlement processing. Refugee advocates and NGOs mentioned that there are some efforts to begin building mechanisms to identify, assess, and refer the most vulnerable for resettlement, such as at-risk women and children and unaccompanied children, and that further procedures could be added as part of existing registrations and interviews to carry out these functions. Also, resettlement can be strengthened as a burden-sharing tool by incorporating larger scale group processing mechanisms in collaboration with UNHCR and the United States.

Community Centers show promise as important staging areas for engaging urban refugees. Several community centers have been built in cities across Turkey to assist the government in welcoming Syrians and others seeking refuge in Turkey. They are run by Turkish and international NGOs. Staff helps refugees with registration, assessment of needs, informal education, psycho-social support programs, and community outreach.

"Opportunity" and "Hard Work" are the hallmarks for refugees being resettled in the United States taken at the Refugee Service Center in Istanbul. Photo by the delegation.



By building 20-30 more schools for refugees in 2015 through its implementing partner UNICEF, Turkey is continuing efforts to build educational capacity for refugees. Another 20-30 schools are planned for urban areas, although none have so far been designated for the large needs in Istanbul. Instruction at some of the schools for refugees is in Arabic, with Turkish language classes provided. In other schools, half the day is taught in Arabic and half in Turkish. In 2012, Turkey approved the use of a Syrian curriculum, though it has been slightly modified by the Syrian opposition. While these are welcome signs of hope, the need is much larger than can be addressed by these efforts.

Turkish officials and NGOs are working with the Syrian community to help create other valuable educational opportunities. There are a relatively small but growing number of private schools and informal educational options for refugee children throughout Turkey. In the southeastern Turkish city of Kilis, for example, the delegation visited a school of some 2000 students run by the Syrian community in a school building that had been given to them by the local government. The teachers are Syrian refugees who had worked as teachers or as professionals before fleeing from Syria. The students attend classes in two shifts. The delegation also visited a school in Istanbul that was run by an NGO. It had 279 non-Syrian, refugee children in attendance whose age ranged from 6 to 16. The school operates 4 hours per day, 5 days per week. In addition, computer classes and English classes are held in the evenings for refugees and migrants. Istanbul has some 20 such programs. Another NGO sponsored Turkish language classes which allowed refugee children to transition into mainstream Turkish schools. Some of these efforts are sponsored at low cost by religious institutions and community groups.

The United States, EU Countries, and other concerned countries made a welcome pledge to resettle 100,000 Syrians in 2015 and 2016. Calling the pledging a “step in the right direction,” António Guterres, the UNHCR High Commissioner, said that there was a further need for resettlement or similar burden sharing outside the region for about 10% of the Syrian refugees.¹¹

The expanding resettlement work of International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) in Turkey is a sign of hope.¹² ICMC has been operational in Turkey since 1967 and is a NGO registered by the Government of Turkey. In partnership with the U.S. State Department, ICMC’s Resettlement Support Center (RSC) in Istanbul conducts resettlement processing and cultural orientation for the thousands of refugees seeking to be resettled in America. In FY14 alone, 5,600 refugees arrived in the United States from Turkey, all with the help of ICMC. Cases referred to ICMC from UNHCR Ankara in FY14 included Iraqi (55%), Syrian (22%) and Iranian (13%). With the escalating armed conflicts in the region, and the exponential growth in the number of people fleeing into Turkey through its Iraq and Syria borders, the U.S. Government has offered to increase the number of Syrians it is ready to resettle and the UNHCR upgraded its capacity to submit resettlement cases to America. ICMC has quickly responded to the dramatic need, recruiting and training additional staff, expanding space, augmenting capacity. As a result, ICMC is already slated to pre-screen over 9,000 people in Turkey and conduct medical screenings for 8,600, and aims for approximately 7,000 refugees to arrive in the United States in FY2015.

Caritas Turkey’s refugee work provides signs of hope. Caritas staff has been doing refugee work since 1991. This has included responding to large refugee influxes. Over the years, staff has also worked with many refugees, especially many at-risk women and children, from Iraq, Afghanistan and Africa and more recently with many Syrian refugees to help them meet their ongoing basic need for livelihood, food security, health care, education, and counseling. Believing that refugees have a right to live in dignity, Caritas has also done projects that strengthen refugees’ ability to be active agents for their own development, such as by assisting them to secure personal documentation or teaching them Turkish or providing support groups for women. Solidarity with refugees is among the most important things that Caritas staff offer.

Recommendations regarding Turkey

To Turkey in collaboration with UNHCR and the international community

PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Create an enhanced registration to gather vital information for assessing immediate needs and viable durable solutions, including for the most vulnerable.

Expand the registration capacity to enable processing of the unregistered and to maintain timely registration in the future, including a mobile registration capability to address large influxes of refugees.

Build UNHCR and NGO capacity to refer vulnerable people for immediate protection or resettlement.

Designate Temporary Protected status for Iraqis.

Fully implement Subsidiary Protection processing so that Afghans and others can be protected from being returned to armed conflict situations and can qualify for vital, temporary benefits and services while in Turkey.

Develop stronger enforcement against perpetrators of human traffickers and labor exploitation and stronger identification, protection, and assistance for victims, especially at-risk women and children, to make them less vulnerable to these harms.

Establish and implement a comprehensive urban refugee protection and humanitarian plan for Syrians and non-Syrians seeking refuge outside of camps that enables them to live in safety and dignity.

Assure timely dissemination of linguistically and culturally appropriate information to those seeking refuge, to government officials, and to NGOs about rights, duties, and benefits for those seeking refuge.

Expand access to livelihood by issuing work permits for registered people who are seeking or have received temporary protection, subsidiary protection, or conditional refugee status.

Expand community services infrastructure and access to education and health care for Syrians and non-Syrians seeking refuge so that access is linguistically and culturally sensitive and comparable to locals.

Provide school for all children seeking refuge through a comprehensive approach that includes

- providing alternative livelihood opportunities so that child labor is not needed to survive;
- supporting Turkish language programs so that children can transition into Turkish schools;
- collaborating with refugee groups to provide quality schools for their communities;
- building more refugee schools through UNICEF;
- adding more double-shifts at local Turkish schools;
- focusing also on non-Syrians in implementing the “No Lost Generation” strategy; and
- by expanding these efforts across Turkey, including in Istanbul.

Continue to build humanitarian collaboration with the international community through increased engagement and partnership with local and international NGOs.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

Remove the geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol.

Strengthen mechanisms for processing groups of conditional refugees for resettlement in collaboration with UNHCR and the U.S. Government (e.g., using Priority 2 and 3 and unaccompanied refugee minor mechanisms).

Increase the resettlement screening capacity of UNHCR in Turkey, in collaboration with the United States and other resettlement countries, to identify, screen, and refer vulnerable individuals for refugee resettlement to third countries.

To the U.S. Government, other governments, and international donors

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Fund Turkey, UNHCR, and other implementing partners to pursue the measures above so that refugee needs are met and local communities' burdens are equitably shared by the international community.

To Catholic Church leaders and other faith leaders

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Mobilize Catholic and other faith communities to generously fund humanitarian efforts by affiliated agencies or partners or by other humanitarian groups serving people in need of international protection in Turkey.

“I wish to express my appreciation for everything that the Turkish people, Muslims and Christians alike, are doing to help the hundreds of thousands of people who are fleeing their countries due to conflicts. This is a clear example of how we can work together to serve others.”

—Pope Francis
in November 27, 2014 visit
to Istanbul, Turkey

REFUGEE

This report primarily details the challenges that people seeking refuge in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece face in those refugee host countries. The delegation also became aware of the challenges they faced before they flee from their home countries. These brief quotations from interviews by delegation members offer a glimpse of why some refugees were forced to flee their home countries.

“I explained to them [the extremists] why I converted to Christianity. When I returned to my home a few hours later, they had killed my mother, my father, my two sisters, and my brother”

—A Syrian youth on his conversion & his loss

“I was trained as an engineer in my country. When protests and demonstrations started I believed in change in Syria, so I demonstrated, too. The regime threw me in prison and tortured me.”

—A Syrian engineer, religious minority
on his punishment for attending
peaceful demonstrations

VOICES

“We were told to convert or die. They [the extremists] left a severed head of our Christian neighbor on his doorstep. We fled.”

—A Christian from near Mosul, Iraq, on why he fled

“They just came and took him,
took him away and tortured him.”

—A Sudanese woman on her husband’s suffering
in their home country

“I worked as an interpreter with the
U.S. Army in Afghanistan. I was forced
to flee by the Taliban.”

—An Afghan Interpreter for U.S. Military on why he fled

“I worked for the UN in Afghanistan. If I go
back, the Taliban would slit my throat.”

—An Afghan woman detained with her husband and
two children on why she cannot return

“Reception conditions have gone from awful to more acceptable conditions.”

—A refugee rights advocate on the changes in the Bulgarian reception centers since January 2014

II. Bulgaria faces a continuing challenge to improve its asylum process and reception while assuring access to its territory and safe, humane integration

GENERAL FINDINGS

Bulgaria, as the EU’s poorest country, faced difficult challenges providing refugee protection prior to the Syrian crisis and even greater ones due to the ongoing crisis.¹³ In meetings with stakeholders, the delegation learned about both past and current challenges. Despite long-time resource challenges, Bulgaria, with a population of 7.8 million and a land area the size of Tennessee, has maintained a long commitment to its small-scale, international protection program. Its legal framework provides for refugee and humanitarian status, temporary protection at times of mass influx, and asylum. In the first 20 years of its refugee program, Bulgaria averaged about 1000 applicants seeking refuge per year. Suddenly, between July and September of 2013, it received the influx from Turkey of nearly 10,000 Syrians seeking refuge. Its migration management and small-scale protection systems were overwhelmed. Urged on by complaints from northern European countries about rising irregular migration into the EU, Bulgaria responded by greatly increasing its migration and land border enforcement, with EU funding.

Meanwhile, UNHCR, in its official role as monitor of states’ obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention, issued a strong statement to Bulgaria and the EU calling for Bulgaria to take “urgent steps” to make “fundamental improvements” in its reception center conditions, asylum adjudication, and lack of access to asylum at international borders or in detention centers.¹⁴ These would be important improvements for Bulgaria to make under any circumstances but are particularly critical given its juxtaposition to the Syrian crisis and its position as an EU border country at the gateway of the EU. Bulgaria has been otherwise challenged during this time with serious domestic matters such as high electrical prices and alleged government corruption that has led to nationwide protests and the formation of two new governments in 18 months, including most recently in October 2014.

PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN FINDINGS

Despite the legal ramifications, many seeking refuge in Bulgaria pursue refuge in northern Europe. Many arrive in Bulgaria and are told by smugglers and others that Bulgaria is a poor country that cannot provide them with refuge and a new life. Many of them request final orders of removal and are released under the stipulation that they leave Bulgaria within 30 days. Most of them travel on to northern Europe. The delegation met others who actually were granted asylum in Bulgaria and planned to travel on to northern Europe anyway. Many take these steps because they reasonably believe they will not be able to survive in Bulgaria. (See discussion of lack of refugee integration in Bulgaria in the Durable Solutions Findings.) However, as described by many stakeholders in Bulgaria, there are legal consequences for many of those traveling on from Bulgaria to refuge in northern Europe. Bulgaria is a member state of the European Union and a signatory to the Dublin Convention. The Dublin Convention requires most people who are seeking asylum in Europe to request and enjoy that protection in their first country of arrival. If those traveling on from Bulgaria later attempt to pursue or permanently enjoy asylum elsewhere, they ordinarily face return to their first country of arrival, namely Bulgaria.

Others who remain in Bulgaria to seek refuge sometimes receive compromised or delayed refugee protection. The much smaller number who do remain in Bulgaria to seek refuge sometimes receive compromised or delayed protection. Some advocates explain that this is because Bulgaria has taken an enforcement approach more than a human rights approach to the refugee influx. Bulgaria, with EU support, built a 33-kilometer fence along its 270-kilometer border with Turkey, stationed 1400 guards there, and added Ministry of Interior detention space in Busmantsi and Lyubimets. At the same time, Bulgaria did not fully, efficiently integrate refugee protection into its migration management, its border registration and screening, and its immigration detention system. Reportedly, it did not effectively link the Ministry of Interior registration system with the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) registration system, and it did not add enough interpreters or trained border officials to identify and do timely referrals of cases to SAR. Advocates also pointed to a lack of access to legal information and legal representation

to pursue asylum in Bulgaria or in northern Europe. Some also added that there is insufficient access for NGOs to monitor detention. Lacking these various protection components, the build up of the Bulgarian migration management system resulted in increased enforcement, sometimes at the expense of protection. These enforcement outcomes included increased arrests, increased convictions for unlawful entry, reported cases of “pushbacks” to Turkey, a deterrent impact on people seeking asylum, and a dramatic decrease in the number of people seeking refuge in Bulgaria.

During the course of the last year, Bulgaria has managed to notably expand the asylum reception system and move the initial influx of asylum seekers into this expanded reception capacity, as is described below. However, if future influxes do come, as seems inevitable, it will not be possible to manage those refugee flows humanely unless there is a sufficient protection mindset and proportional protection resources at these initial points of enforcement. This also includes building up Bulgaria’s capacity and commitment to identify and protect refugees and other vulnerable migrants who are victims of human trafficking. Not a single foreign-born trafficking victim was identified by Bulgaria last year.¹⁵

Bulgaria has nearly quadrupled its refugee reception center capacity. With some support from the European Union (EU) countries and NGOs, Bulgaria renovated government properties into reception centers so that they might better meet the humanitarian needs of those seeking refuge. The delegation visited two reception centers in Harmanli and Vrazhdebna that are run by the State Agency for Refugees (SAR). The centers hold an estimated 1,000 and 300 people, respectively. Harmanli, a former military barracks, is an open center near the Bulgarian-Turkish border. Vrazhdebna, a former school, is a closed center near the Sofia airport. All told, an estimated 3,000 people seeking refuge are currently living in the seven SAR reception centers that have a capacity of 4,600. SAR plans to expand its reception capacity to 6,000 by the end of 2014. Given that SAR’s reception capacity was 1250 in 2013, SAR has nearly quadrupled its reception capacity, and with the planned expansion, the capacity will be nearly quintupled by the end of 2014. SAR’s expansion includes a center for unaccompanied children located in Banya, a Roma ethnic area in central Bulgaria. However, there are concerns that a significant number of children disappear from the center with their whereabouts unknown.

Bulgaria has expanded and improved its asylum decision-making process.¹⁶ Among asylum seekers taken in by Bulgaria in 2014, most are coming through Turkey, including 77% who are Syrians and also Iraqis, Afghans, Iranians, and some Africans. The overall grant rate for the combined categories of refugee and humanitarian status is 50%. To begin to meet the expanded protection needs, Bulgaria doubled the staff of the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), and received extensive training for its asylum case officers from the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). By the end of September 2014, Bulgaria had processed 7,150 applications for the year, completing most cases in the required 3 months. UNHCR reports that Bulgaria has over 9,000 registered people seeking refuge. The actual number is likely much higher, especially in the Sofia area. This is due to the alternative release mechanisms mentioned above.



Harmanli Reception Center houses over 1,000 refugees and the Bulgarian Red Cross provides many services for refugees in Harmanli and throughout Bulgaria. Photo by the delegation.

“Bulgaria has welcomed me and given me asylum. I would stay if I thought my family and I could survive here.”

—A young Syrian asylee on his future plans

“If you have to rely on the Bulgarian social system, you will die.”

—A refugee advocate who knows the Bulgarian system well

While reception space is expanded and improved, some space remains unsafe and staffing insufficient. A small village of emergency housing containers for families has been added to the sprawling grounds of the Harmanli facility and some new furnishings added to the aging four-story, yellow dormitory that had been abandoned as soldier barracks and is being revived as living space for some 108 single mothers. While these reportedly are major improvements from conditions in 2013, the grounds still need to be cleaned up of hazards and made safe for children, and a safe playground is needed. Children, mostly Syrian, milled around in the container village, on an asphalt square near the barracks, and wandered off to the outreaches of the property. The building for single mothers had no lock on the outside doors or the inside doors, and there were people in the hallways other than those who lived there. Also, there was very little staff around to intervene if protection concerns were to arise, especially for women or children.

Those who elect release from immigration detention to pursue refugee status while living in an urban setting are at great risk of being destitute.¹⁷ At the beginning of the asylum process, if an asylum seeker's desire to seek asylum has not been timely passed on to SAR or if asylum reception space is full, an asylum seeker can spend weeks, even months in migration detention. Some resort to providing an outside address of family or sponsor in Bulgaria in order to be released but also thereby forfeit eligibility to receive any support from the government. Also, for those who later secure international protection, they must leave the asylum reception center within a month even though Bulgaria has no integration system. In both instances, people face destitution and lack livelihood, assistance, housing, water, and food. A third group that faces similar destitution includes those who received status in Bulgaria, travelled on to northern Europe, and was returned to Bulgaria pursuant to the Dublin Convention. (See Dublin Convention's impact in Durable Solutions Findings).

There is a lack of access to education for children seeking refuge. Asylum seekers have a legal right in Bulgaria to attend school, but reportedly almost none of them do. Among Harmanli's 383 children at the time of the visit, the delegation found only one who attended school. The Bulgarian language entrance requirement is a major obstacle to school attendance. Also, some refugee parents are unaware of their children's right to attend school. Others do not make the effort to enroll their children because they view Bulgaria as a transit country. An additional obstacle has been reported in some rural areas such as Rozovo where apparently due to xenophobia the town drove three refugee families away.¹⁸ Local advocates noted that another nearby town did take in the families, and also said that such fears are rare in Sofia where there is more racial and religious diversity.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS FINDINGS

Bulgaria has no integration program for refugees. Bulgaria's laws gives refugees the right to receive education and health insurance but access has been more aspirational than real. Bulgaria, reportedly, had a small integration plan for about 60 refugees but it came to an end in November 2013. With a recent change in government, a new plan has not yet been approved. A new integration plan needs to be implemented on a much bigger scale than the former one. Otherwise, it would be far from accommodating even the 1000 new asylees per year who have been arriving let alone the much higher number of asylees who would start flowing to Bulgaria if it were to step up to share the burden with Turkey and other major Syrian refugee host countries. Another challenge to integration, according to local advocates, is an undercurrent of anti-refugee sentiments in more ethnically and religiously homogeneous rural areas of Bulgaria. Some political parties, such as the nationalist Ataka ("Attack") party and the National Front for Bulgaria's Salvation (also known as the "Patriotic Front") try to take political advantage of these sentiments and fears.

There appear to be at least two pressures on Bulgaria to strengthen its capacity to provide or facilitate durable solutions: the escalating onward migration from Turkey and Bulgaria's standing obligation to take back Dublin Convention returnees. As noted above, many Syrians and others are beginning to seek refuge beyond Turkey and the other already saturated neighboring host countries. Bulgaria received a taste of that reality with the influx of Syrians in the summer and fall of 2013. And even with increased enforcement at Bulgaria's international land borders that curtailed much of the land migration, Syrians and others seeking refuge keep finding alternative routes to Bulgaria. The delegation heard several accounts from refugees who had fled Turkey via dangerous journeys on the Black Sea to the Bulgarian coast, and later heard many accounts of refugees taking the dangerous water routes in the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece. If onward migration keeps increasing and tragic deaths at

sea mount, Bulgaria and the EU will likely face pressure to provide safer pathways for people to pursue durable solutions either through asylum and integration in Bulgaria or through facilitation of regular migration from Bulgaria to asylum or resettlement countries outside the region.

A second pressure on Bulgaria and the EU comes from Bulgaria's obligation under the Dublin Convention, mentioned above, to return an asylum seeker to the first country of arrival to pursue asylum. SAR reported that as of September 2014, northern EU countries notified Bulgaria that some 5082 asylum seekers should be returned to Bulgaria, pursuant to Dublin, to pursue their asylum. For the first four months of 2014, UNHCR advised EU countries that it was not proper under the EU's own regulations to return any asylum seeker to Bulgaria given the poor conditions. However, by April they advised that enough progress had been made so that the EU countries could resume the returns, although UNHCR urged them not to return vulnerable asylum seekers to Bulgaria. As of September northern EU countries reportedly had returned only about 100 people, which Bulgarian officials took as a sign of solidarity from their fellow EU members. Despite the current reprieve for Bulgaria, the pressures of ongoing Syrian migration and the Dublin dynamics remain, calling out to Bulgaria and the EU to expand and improve Bulgaria's protection space and or its role in facilitating onward regular migration. Facilitating such expansion and improvements may require changes in EU asylum policy.

SIGNS OF HOPE

Bulgaria has a history of being a country of refuge. According to a local refugee advocate, Bulgaria welcomed various ethnic Bulgarian groups forced to return after the end of the Ottoman Empire, at the end of World War I, and as a result of the Balkan Wars (1912-1923) when regional borders continued to shift. It provided refuge to fleeing Armenians in the early 1900s, to people from the former Soviet Union after 1989, and to refugees through its small refugee program over the last 20 years. Bulgaria has also welcomed sizeable numbers of Africans and others from developing countries to its universities.

The Bulgarian Governments' positive protection efforts during 2014 are a sign of hope. Its efforts to improve and professionalize asylum decision-making and to expand and improve its reception system demonstrate a commitment to refugee protection that could potentially be channeled into further improving these areas, and into integrating protection into enforcement, and creating viable urban refugee and integration programs. The 2014 efforts also are a sign to donors that an investment in asylum protection can bear fruit in Bulgaria.

The work of Caritas and the Red Cross and other nongovernmental organizations, churches and other faith communities are signs of hope. The Bulgarian Red Cross, Caritas, and other Bulgarian NGOs are deeply committed refugee advocates who continue to push for positive change, help to carry out that change as implementing partners by serving those seeking refuge, and help to harness the energy of many community volunteers such as the "Friends of Refugees" group that helped to provide humanitarian care for the many seeking refuge in Bulgaria during the last year. In the absence of Bulgaria having a governmental integration program for refugees, the Most Reverend Christo Proykov, Catholic Bishop in Sofia, has taken in an Iraqi family of seven and allowed them to stay in his house in Sofia. Two of the daughters are now attending university.

Recommendations regarding Bulgaria

To Bulgaria in collaboration with the Bulgarian Red Cross

PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide refugee protection staff in border holding areas and in detention centers and train enforcement staff on child and refugee protection to facilitate timely identification, registering and transfer of children and those in need of international protection to appropriate reception centers and asylum processes.

Do not detain children or families.

Continue improving the capacity and quality of reception space and add sufficient staff, including those trained in child and refugee protection, to assure a safe environment and capacity to identify and intervene if protection or humanitarian concerns arise.

Continue improving the capacity, quality, and efficiency of asylum decision-making.

Continue improving the capacity and quality of reception space and add sufficient staff, including those trained in child and refugee protection, to assure a safe environment and capacity to identify and intervene if protection or humanitarian concerns arise.

Help assure access to education for all children seeking refuge in Bulgaria, including by informing them and their parents of the children's right to education and by supporting Bulgarian language training and cultural orientation for children.

Develop an urban refugee program for those pursuing international protection for whom there is no reception space, assuring that they can pursue protection while living in safety and dignity.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

Transform migration management policy and practice so that it prioritizes and assures refugee protection and durable solutions for those seeking refuge in Bulgaria.

Implement a viable integration program for people granted international protection in Bulgaria that facilitates language training, livelihood, and transitional housing and assistance.

To U.S. Government, the EU, other governments, and international donors

DURABLE SOLUTIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

Share Bulgaria's burden by establishing with Bulgaria, with support from UNHCR, a targeted refugee resettlement program, matching certain refugees located in Bulgaria with resettlement countries that have close ties with them or have a particular concern for them (e.g., matching Afghans who interpreted for the U.S. Military with the United States; matching refugees in Bulgaria with resettlement countries where they have immediate relatives or other designated close ties; and matching unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) with the United States since it has developed an Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) program to meet their needs (see V. Regional Concerns for more on URM)).

FUNDING RECOMMENDATION

Fund Bulgaria and implementing partners to carry out the above measures, especially the continued reform of asylum and the transformation of the migration management policy and practice to prioritize refugee protection.

To Catholic Church leaders and other faith leaders

FUNDING RECOMMENDATION

Mobilize Catholic and other faith communities to generously fund humanitarian efforts by affiliated agencies or partners or by other humanitarian groups serving people in need of international protection in Bulgaria.

Two members of the Iraqi refugee family of seven whom the bishop of Sofia has welcomed to live with him. The bishop's support has helped them be able to begin university studies. Photo by the delegation.



III. Greece faces a continuing challenge to keep building its new asylum system, replace harsh detention with humane reception and release, and establish safe, humane integration

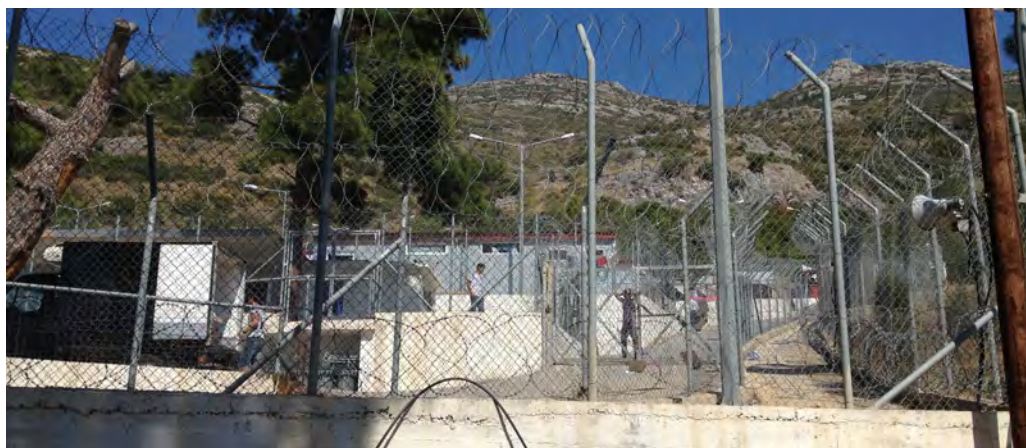
GENERAL FINDINGS

Greece faces continued, stiff challenges to expand and improve its refugee protection and integration.¹⁹ The delegation noted higher numbers of people in need of international protection and challenging obstacles to improving refugee protection in Greece. Greece is a relatively small nation of 10.8 million people with a land area slightly smaller than Alabama. While being one of the EU nations hardest hit by the recent economic downturn, it continues to have some 500,000 irregular migrants at any given time, including many asylum seekers. Greece reportedly has some 50,000 refugees and asylum seekers, and another 23,000 persons of concern to UNHCR. Greek law provides for refugee status based on the 1951 Refugee Convention and also subsidiary protection if deportation would put the applicant at risk of serious harm.²⁰ Someone who has applied for or been granted international protection is supposed to have comparable social rights to those of a Greek citizen (except the right to vote). Irregular migrants have a right to emergency health care and all children have a right to attend school. Among those seeking refuge in Greece, large numbers are transiting from Turkey including those originally from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iran. There are also large numbers fleeing to Greece from Africa, including Somalis, Congolese, Eritreans, and Sudanese.

While Greece has greatly improved its asylum processing system with a 2011 law²¹ and the help of its implementing partner UNHCR, there continues to be a large backlog of asylum seekers whose cases need attention. Also, the asylum reception center capacity is very small. Unfortunately, with the lack of reception space, Greece uses its often-harsh detention centers to hold the people seeking refuge who are part of the influxes, including asylum seekers and unaccompanied children. The final and perhaps largest challenge for Greece is that there is no viable integration system for refugees once they are granted status.

PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN FINDINGS

Many people seeking refuge in Greece are either deterred by government detention from pursuing protection at all in Greece or suffer through protracted, often harsh detention while they pursue asylum. Despite having 500,000 irregular migrants at any given time, Greece only has reception space for 1,000 people, space for 300 at the La Vrio facility run by the Greek Red Cross and space for 700 provided by the Catholic Sisters of Mercy. Instead of building up more reception space, Greece has built up its detention space to 5000 beds with plans for 10,000 by the end of 2014. This follows a practice of instituting an enforcement and security oriented response more than a protection response



Samos Screening Center provides asylum seekers fleeing from Turkey to Greece with a harsh first impression of Greece. Photo by the delegation.

“My baby, my sister and I came by foot, camel, boat. We slept in the bush, about 14 of us all together. We fled because my parents had been killed. My husband was in Mali sick and unable to travel ... I am trying to get to France or Germany.”

—A detained, pregnant Mali mother fleeing the murder of her parents.

“Integration is not on the map in Greece.”

—A Greek NGO advocate active in helping refugees and migrants

to the refugee influxes of Syrians from Turkey. Advocates complain that Greece uses detention to deter people from coming to or remaining in Greece. The length of time in detention and poor conditions have a deterrent impact. Greek authorities did issue a promising directive in April 2013 to release Syrians who have final deportation orders from detention once they proved their nationality. Virtually all of them plan to travel on to northern Europe and this release facilitates that journey.

The inhumane detention conditions at the Samos Screening Center on Samos Island are of great concern. The delegation visited this closed detention center meant for 275 inhabitants. Some 400 were there the days of the visit. The population had risen to as high as 900 several months earlier. The high numbers are due to over 15,000 sea rescues near Samos and other Aegean Islands for June, July, and August of 2014, according to UNHCR. Only five guards are reportedly on duty at a time at the center. Basic safety and humanitarian needs are not being met. There is insufficient vaccination, medical screenings, and capacity to treat people. Reportedly, only people with severe cases see the doctor. Toilets are often blocked and there are few cleaning supplies. Detainees told the delegation that living in the detention center was like living in a “ghetto” where there was constant bullying, daily fights, ongoing violence, prostitution, and blackmail. At one point in the summer, there was almost no water, only one pipe with access to water, but certain detained people controlled access to this water. Those in detention reportedly sometimes have to pay someone to use the shower. When asked why they don’t hand out cleaning supplies, the staff said that they felt that their physical safety would be threatened by such a distribution because of the overwhelming desire for the cleaning supplies. There are insufficient officers to respond to these health and safety concerns.

Vulnerable people in the center are at particular risk. Some young children received donated toys but children are not allowed to use the play structure most of the time and there are no organized activities for them. There are a fairly large number of pregnant women among those seeking refuge with some of those pregnancies resulting from rapes while they were on their journeys. There are already people eating and sleeping outside due to lack of space. A Syrian woman who arrived at the same time as the delegation told us that she was told she was very lucky to get a bed since most people do not receive a bed when they first arrive.

Caritas Athens provides meals for 350 refugees per day in a soup kitchen in the Refugee Center run by five staff and seventy volunteers. Photo by the delegation.



Greece has significantly improved its asylum decision-making process with a recent new law and action plan, although further process improvements are still needed. Greece had been criticized for having a dysfunctional asylum system that was cumbersome and had a grant rate under 1%. The European Court found that Greece was not a “safe country” for asylum seekers.²² This led to EU financial and technical support enabling Greece to pursue asylum reform. Greece passed a new law 3907/2011 and finished its first full year under the new system on May 31, 2014, several months before the delegation’s visit. During that first full year, the new Asylum Service reported receiving 8,945 asylum cases, 78.3% from men and 21.7% from women. They completed 8,851 cases. The combined grant rate for initial cases and appeal cases was around 25%, comparable to EU standards.

Those seeking refuge in urban areas seriously lack livelihood, housing, food, and healthcare. Advocates estimate that there are some 250,000 irregular migrants in Athens alone and many of them are in need of international protection. Life is extremely difficult for those living as undocumented people on the margins of society. Reportedly, many sleep in parks, in abandoned buildings, or in run-down hotels. Sometimes 20, 30, or 50 people come together to rent living space. In response to the precarious housing, UNHCR has handed out some 10,000 sleeping bags in the last year. Some 60% get their food from the rubbish heaps and the rest from soup kitchens, such as the daily one run by Caritas in Athens. Asked what they would do if they received more funding, Caritas staff said they would buy milk for the children. Work for those seeking refuge is irregular at best, often demeaning and dirty and involves long hours. For healthcare, there is access to emergency care and otherwise only to health care provided by NGOs.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS FINDINGS

Greece has no viable integration system for people who receive refugee or subsidiary protection status. According to Greek law, refugees or people granted subsidiary protection have the same rights as a Greek citizen to employment, education, vocational training, health care, and social assistance. In practice, they rarely find work, advocates say, because employers, contrary to the law, often give Greeks priority. The economic downturn has made matters even worse. Stakeholders noted that the unemployment rate is 38% overall and 56% for youth. Some 60,000 legal migrants (including refugees) lost their jobs. There are fewer jobs and lower wages. UNHCR noted women at risk, persons with disabilities and the elderly are even more impacted by the downturn. Also, unaccompanied refugee children are at particular risk because Greece has an undeveloped child protection system that already struggles to protect abused Greek children.

Greece has serious anti-immigrant violence that provides a major barrier for refugee integration. UNHCR reported that there were some 166 incidents of racist violence with at least 320 victims in 2013 and 143 of the incidences involved refugees or migrants. Golden Dawn, an anti-immigrant party that has grown from being 5% to 8% from 2009 to 2014, claimed responsibility for many of the incidents. At Caritas’ Refugee Center, the delegation saw refugees wait for their daily meal vertically lined up inside the center along the winding four-story stairwell because Golden Dawn threatens them with violence when they wait on the street.

SIGNS OF HOPE

EU investments in Greece have led to significant improvements in the asylum system. With strong EU support, Greece, through its implementing partner UNHCR, has transformed its system for making asylum decisions. EU’s strong commitment to improving the Greek system is a sign of hope not only for the positive change it has wrought so far but also for the further transformation that a continued commitment to asylum reform could provide.

Caritas helps to fill the humanitarian and protection gaps for those seeking refuge in Greece. At the Refugee Center in Athens, it works through 5 full time staff and 70 volunteers to provide meals for 320 people per day, including 70-80 children. It provides groceries for 50 families per month, distributes clothing and bed linen, provides health care classes, and vaccinations, teaches Greek and English and does social service outreach. It likewise works with local churches on the Greek islands and elsewhere to provide clothes, food, and other resources for newcomers. Caritas also educates the community about the plight of asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants and advocates for better migration policy.

ICMC works as UNHCR's implementing partner to help reform Greece's asylum system. ICMC has played an indispensable role in helping Greece undertake asylum reform. They are working to improve first reception conditions and protection for new arrivals, including the most vulnerable, and improving access to and the quality of refugee status determination procedures. They have a strong presence at the Central Asylum Service in Athens. Their protection work also includes providing "know your rights" presentations for recent maritime arrivals in Samos, Lesbos, Chios, and other Greek islands throughout the Aegean Sea. Besides their work in Athens and the islands, they are also deployed in Thessaloniki, Alexandroupolis, and Orestiada.

Recommendations regarding Greece

To Greece and the EU in collaboration with UNHCR

PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase the international protection response to irregular migration to the Greek Islands by providing child and refugee appropriate facilities, staffing to assure health care and protection, and legal service staff to orient people about their rights.

Do not detain children or families.

Release from detention those seeking international protection or those whose deportation cannot be completed because of conditions in their home country.

Double the size of the asylum reception system to 2000.

Close or greatly improve the conditions at the Samos Screening Center assuring that facilities are appropriate for registering, processing, and housing people who are seeking international protection.

Consolidate the progress made and continue increasing the capacity and improving the efficiency and quality of the new Asylum Service.



Greece has effective partnership with UNHCR and ICMC to provide rights presentations in Samos to help refugees understand their rights under Greek law. Photo by the delegation.

Process the backlog of 41,000 cases through the new Asylum Service in an expeditious, fair way that is consistent with the new standards and processes developed by the new Asylum Service.

Develop an urban refugee program that provides shelter and basic necessities for individuals pursuing international protection in Greece that allows them to live in safety and dignity during the processing of their claims.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

Transform migration management policy and practice so that it prioritizes and assures refugee protection and durable solutions for those seeking refuge in Greece.

Implement viable integration program for people granted international protection in Greece that facilitates language training, livelihood, and transitional housing and assistance.

To the EU, U.S. Government, other governments, and international donors

DURABLE SOLUTIONS RECOMMENDATION:

Share Greece's burden by establishing with Greece, with support from UNHCR, a targeted refugee resettlement program, matching certain refugees located in Greece with resettlement countries that have close ties with them or have a particular concern for them (e.g., matching Afghans who interpreted for the U.S. Military with the United States, matching refugees in Greece with resettlement countries where they have immediate relatives or other designated close ties; and matching unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) with the United States since it has developed a URM program to meet their needs (see V. Regional Concerns for more on URM)).

FUNDING RECOMMENDATION

Fund Greece and implementing partners to fund the above programs and reforms.

To Catholic Church leaders and other faith leaders

FUNDING RECOMMENDATION

Mobilize Catholic and other faith communities to generously fund humanitarian efforts by affiliated agencies or partners or by other groups serving people in need of international protection in Greece.

“I have five daughters and cannot stay in Afghanistan because of security problems. Big problems, especially for women.”

—An Afghan mother of four girls

IV. Regional challenges

GENERAL FINDING

Three recurring durable solution concerns run throughout the region. The delegation continued to witness the plight of Afghans and the plight of unaccompanied children unable to attain durable solutions, and also saw the phenomenon of serial forced migration driven by the Syrian crisis and people’s onward search for durable solutions.

A. Afghans in the region are in need of international protection

THE SILENT EMERGENCY

In Turkey, Afghans lack access to international protection status, and are suffering through what one advocate described as “a silent emergency” (one for which no alarm has sounded). As mentioned earlier, Turkey has a new migration law, passed in April 2013 and partially implemented in 2014. Among other things, it provides for subsidiary protection that protects people from being deported back to situations of generalized conflict and armed conflict. Prior to the passage of the new law, Afghans applied with UNHCR under the old law to be protected from removal. With the passage of the new law, UNHCR stopped its previous practice with Afghans believing that the new law would provide the needed protection from return to Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the full implementation of protection under the new law has not yet occurred in Turkey, and Afghans are not able to pursue the new protection. Afghans are left undocumented, unprotected, and without access to state schools, work permits, and health care (except for emergencies). This comes at a time when there is an increased onward migration of Afghans to Turkey from Iran, where they had previously sought refuge but where protection conditions have deteriorated.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

In Bulgaria, Afghans who worked as translators for the U.S. Military in Afghanistan are viewed by Bulgaria as economic migrants, and they are subject to deportation back to Afghanistan. The delegation met three young men at Vrazhdebna Reception Center in Sofia who had served with the U.S. Military in Afghanistan and one of them was facing deportation the next day to Afghanistan. The U.S. Embassy in Sofia does not actively pursue protection for these Afghans, and there are no referral mechanism for them to enter the U.S. refugee program. Border officials in Greece also reported that they often see Afghan interpreters in Greece that worked for the U.S. Military in Afghanistan. The delegation was particularly struck that such Afghans are of particular interest to the United States because their refugee claims are based on persecution in Afghanistan that is a response to their role helping the U.S. Military. A further sign of U.S. concern for this group is that the U.S. created a special immigrant visa for which they can apply as well.

GREECE PROTECTS AFGHANS SEEKING REFUGE

In Greece, Afghans are recognized as people in need of international protection. The delegation spoke with and received reports about numerous Afghans seeking refuge in Athens and on Samos. They included men and women targeted by the Taliban, interpreters and others who had been threatened for working with the U.S. Mission in Afghanistan, and numerous unaccompanied minors who had fled forced recruitment by the Taliban, dangerous domestic violence situations, and sexual abuse. The Greek Asylum Service recently reported that 25.4% of the Afghan males who requested protection were granted refugee status and 33.7% were granted subsidiary protection. For females, 80% were granted refugee status and 20% subsidiary protection. Some 28% of the applicants were minors. These grant figures are consistent with Afghans’ accounts of serious protection needs heard by the delegation throughout the region.

Recommendations regarding Afghans

To Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece, with the EU, United States and UNHCR

Implement regional protection policies and practices regarding Afghans that assure their access to appropriate protection, humanitarian support, and durable solutions.

Implement subsidiary status processing so that Afghans and others can be protected from being returned to armed conflict situations and can qualify for vital services while in Turkey.

Implement resettlement referral mechanisms to the United States for Afghans in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece, particularly those who assisted the U.S. military or U.S. interests.

Create a Priority 2 (P-2) designation for Afghans who worked for the U.S. Military or other U.S. interests in Afghanistan (similar to the P-2 for similarly situated Iraqis in Iraq).

B. Most unaccompanied children seeking refuge in these three countries are out of sight and out of mind as refugees in need of durable solutions

There are likely much higher numbers of unaccompanied refugee children in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece than are identified. Few are identified because of overwhelmed registration systems in Turkey and lack of governmental systems and NGO attention and resources in all three countries to identify, protect, and refer them. Over one year ago, UNHCR had already identified 3760 unaccompanied and separated Syrian children in the neighboring host countries of Lebanon and Turkey.²³ Thus far no such identification process has happened in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece. In Turkey, this may be in part due to the overwhelmed registration systems described above. In Bulgaria and Greece, there is a growing awareness about unaccompanied children but systems are not in place to respond. For example, in Greece at the Samos Screening Center there were 30 unaccompanied children when the delegation arrived, and an additional 8 children (Afghan and Syrian) arrived the same day. This was only one day, at one center on one of 20 islands. It suggests the potential for identifying many more unaccompanied children.

Throughout the region, unaccompanied children and youth, if identified and as space allows, are placed in child welfare institutions until age 18, and then are largely left to fend for themselves. In Bulgaria, the arriving unaccompanied children are kept in a remote location in the town of Banya, separate from other arriving asylum seekers. A local non-governmental entity is providing after school activities. While Bulgaria is demonstrating good practice in separating unaccompanied children from other populations and providing care through the domestic child welfare system, the delegation learned that many of these children are disappearing from the center—likely en route to other European countries with speculation that they are likely “taken care of by smugglers or traffickers.” In Turkey and Greece in particular, there were similar reports. These children are perhaps even more vulnerable to violence. For example, in Turkey in the past year, an Afghan child was reportedly beaten to death by local police when he refused to say he was 18. And in Greece, Afghans, as well as other children, are vulnerable to xenophobic attacks. Bulgarian and Greek advocates also mentioned that statutes related to adult guardians for these children are insufficient and provide inadequate mechanisms to assure that government actions related to the child are in the child’s best interest. In the Bulgarian statute the guardian is the mayor of the town where the child resides, and in Greece, the guardian is the state prosecutor.

When first encountered by migration authorities, unaccompanied children seeking refuge in Greece are often placed in harsh detention conditions. The delegation also visited the Amydaleza Detention Center in Athens that has a unit for 40 unaccompanied children. Both facilities are closed prison facilities surrounded by cyclone fences topped by razor wire. The facility outside Athens has better conditions than the Samos facility, although the children complained about bad food, including spoiled

“I will tell you about a 14 year old girl. When she showed up at the Greek border, she was with a man, who said they were brother and sister. Later they were separately interviewed. During the interview she started crying. She said that she had been sold into trafficking by her own mother, so that her mother and sister could have enough money to pay a smuggler.”

—Greek NGO describing unaccompanied child being trafficked

“Five times we tried to cross the [Turkish] border. Three by land. Two by sea.... At one border, all our money (2000 euros) was stolen from us.... Twice we were shipwrecked.”

—A Syrian medical student, from Damascus

fish that had a bad smell, and the lack of hygiene materials. There are very few appropriate spaces for unaccompanied children in Greece. The children in Athens said that they were told that if they apply for asylum they would remain in the detention center for at least a year.

Thus far, there has not been a concerted effort in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece to build a comprehensive approach to protect and care for the unaccompanied children. There is virtually no access to resettlement or other durable solutions for these children. Advocates in Turkey noted that it is very difficult to integrate unaccompanied children and said that for most of them “resettlement is the most durable solution.” The U.S. Government has an unaccompanied refugee minor program to which UNHCR refers unaccompanied child refugees from all parts of the world. There are no set quotas for such referrals. Yet people in a position to do referrals did not believe that resettlement referrals of unaccompanied minors would be accepted by either the UNHCR or the U.S. Government. Another possible durable solution for these children might be family unification through refugee resettlement or a family reunification visa process for children having family members in Europe or the United States.

Recommendations regarding unaccompanied children

To Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece, with the EU, United States and UNHCR

Do not detain children.

Develop interim care options in home-like settings that mitigate disappearances, proactively seek family reunification where possible, and implement durable solutions prior to children turning 18.

Implement regional policies and practices for unaccompanied children that assures that mechanisms are in place to identify unaccompanied children, assess their needs, and pursue durable solutions for them, and pass national legislation that helps assure that each state is operating in the best interest of the child.



People seeking refuge beyond Turkey arrive daily on Samos and some 20 other Greek islands with these small bags (set down near the processing area) and the clothes on their backs. Photo by the delegation.

C. Serial forced migration

Migration enforcement has not stopped irregular migration to northern Europe, only shifted it; and those seeking refuge have been forced to take ever more dangerous routes at the mercy of human smugglers. African refugees reportedly used to flee through Spain and Portugal, and then shifted to Greece and Turkey on the way to Malta and Italy. Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis and others moving on from Turkey shifted from primarily land routes to Bulgaria and to northern Greece to sea routes from Turkey's west coast to some 20 Greek island spots in the Aegean Sea. Frontex reported that 3,500 had arrived by sea in June, 5,000 in July, and 7,000 in August, for a total of 23,000 during the first eight months of 2014, a 300% increase from the same 8-month period in 2013. Some 60% were Syrians and 20-25% Afghans. Smugglers charge people \$3,000 to \$5,000 to go from Turkey to Greece and often keep (and later sell) the people's identification documents. They advise them to overturn the boat when the Greek Coast Guard comes so that the authorities will take them on to Greece and not tell them to paddle back to Turkey. Five people recently died en route to Samos alone, only 1 of 20 island destinations in the Aegean Sea.

There is an emerging pattern of serial forced migration from Syria and Iraq to Turkey through Bulgaria and Greece to northern Europe. Advocates fear that without a substantial increase in funding to address the crisis in Turkey, those seeking refuge will experience increasingly widespread protection problems and humanitarian suffering. In interviews, observers described Turkey's humanitarian refugee crisis as growing into a social crisis for Turkey. The ever-greater strain on Turkey's community infrastructure is increasingly impacting the local communities. Without more international support for Turkey, observers fear that the prospect for those seeking refuge to pursue durable solutions in Turkey of third country resettlement or eventual return to their home countries will be increasingly diminished. This could further perpetuate the growing irregular, unsafe migration of refugees to Bulgaria and Greece and onward to northern EU countries and beyond. This onward migration is for those with resources or those who, out of desperation, put themselves at the mercy of human smugglers. For others without resources who remain in Turkey, there could be growing unrest and disillusionment, a growing feeling of being trapped with little hope.

Bulgaria and Greece play an inevitable role in the Syrian refugee crisis because they are near Syria and are EU border countries that stand at the gateway to the EU, but whether each one facilitates or impedes protection depends on those two countries and the EU making continued reforms and adjustments in response to the crisis. Currently almost all asylum seekers coming from Turkey to Bulgaria and Greece have arrived by irregular migration and will continue onward by irregular migration. For the reasons described in this report, some seeking refuge have been unable to access protection or if they have secured protected status in Bulgaria or Greece, they are forced to leave because neither country has a viable integration system. Irregular migration can harm people seeking refuge because it potentially puts them on the wrong side of the law. The mode of transport and the journey is often dangerous. It costs much more than regular transit, draining away valuable resources that could otherwise pay living expenses or be invested in education or vocational training that would increase resilience in the new situation. It is harmful to the sending and receiving countries because it fosters a shadow world in which smugglers and traffickers feed off the vulnerability of those seeking refuge, not only for the immediate journey but often in prolonged, exploited labor situations. People are forced to give money to criminal enterprises instead of to legitimate local businesses and services. Moreover, most asylum seekers who enter the EU through Bulgaria or Greece as their first EU country are subject to be returned because of the Dublin Convention. This creates a potential Sisyphus nightmare for both those seeking refuge and for countries that are doing repeated processing of the same people. There is the perpetual, uphill pursuit of protection and durable solutions, but when you think you have reached the pinnacle and success, you find yourself forced back to the starting point at the bottom of the hill.

“All the time. I had nothing but God. Everything else had been taken away. And I was constantly looking at death in the face... I said, “You are my God, my life is in your hands. Please help me.”

—A Syrian medical student,
from Damascus

Recommendations regarding serial forced migration

To Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece in collaboration with the EU, UNHCR, and the international community

Implement comprehensive durable solution policies and practices to respond to the Syria crisis to maximize the capacity of each nation to provide durable solutions through integration or facilitate durable solutions by being a staging areas for targeted resettlement or other burden sharing outside the region (See Bulgaria's and Greece's Durable Solutions Recommendations about targeted resettlement).

Implement an EU asylum status that is not tied to a particular EU country and provide placement screening that offers technical assistance and family reunification, matches the needs of refugees with the most appropriate country and municipality throughout the EU, and provides all integration needs until they can be firmly established.

To the EU, United States, and other resettlement countries

Increase the number of resettled refugees accepted from Turkey, including Syrians but also Afghans, Iraqis, Africans, and others.

V. Conclusion

With escalating violence and displacement caused by the Syrian crisis, there has been a corresponding expansion of the international humanitarian crisis for those fleeing from it, for the nearby countries hosting them, and for other non-Syrian refugees in those host countries. With the rise of ISIS, growing numbers of Christians and other religious minorities are fleeing religious persecution, and growing numbers, such as the Kurds, are fleeing ethnic persecution. This is in addition to the large numbers of Syria's majority population that continue to flee. The international community should fully fund and support Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece to strengthen each country's protection, humanitarian care, and pursuit of durable solutions for those seeking refuge, particularly temporary integration in Turkey and long-term integration in Bulgaria and Greece. Support for Turkey is most urgent since it currently hosts the largest number of people fleeing from Syria. The viability of future voluntary return for over 1.6 million Syrians depends on maintaining a decent quality of life in Turkey during the protracted Syrian conflict. Turkey also facilitates small-scale but important burden sharing outside the region by processing refugees for third country resettlement. Support for Bulgaria and Greece is important to enable them to maximize their capacities as refugee host countries providing protection and integration and as transit countries with the potential to facilitate regular migration and pursuit of durable solutions in countries outside of the region. Beyond their role as donors, the United States, the EU member states, and other concerned countries should also share the burden by being countries of refuge. This means working with UNHCR and Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece to also facilitate access to asylum, third country resettlement, and complementary protection outside the region.

Delegation of the Committee on Migration



Front row right to left: Delegation Leader, Ambassador Johnny Young (retired), Executive Director of Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Nathalie Lummert, Director of Special Programs, Jane Bloom, Head of U.S. Office, International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC); Anastasia Brown, Director of Resettlement Services.

Back row left to right: Father Daniel Groody, CSC, Associate Professor of Theology, Notre Dame University, Diane Bayly, Grants and Programs Administrator, and Matthew Wilch, Refugee Policy Advisor. (MRS carries out the work of the Committee on Migration. Unless otherwise noted, the delegation members are MRS staff.) Photo by S.Z.

Acronyms and Definitions²⁴

AFAD	Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (Turkey)
ASAM	Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers
DGMM	Directorate General for Migration Management (Turkey)
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
ECtHR	European Court for Human Rights
EU	European Union
ICMC	International Catholic Migration Commission
IDP	internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IS	Islamic State
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
MRS	Migration and Refugee Services
NGO	nongovernmental organization
SAR	State Agency for Refugees (Bulgaria)
TL	Turkish lira
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USCCB	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Complementary Forms of Protection. Besides comprehensive, long-term forms of international protection, there are complementary, short-term forms. A country adopts one or more of these to fill protection gaps for people who may not qualify for refugee protection in the country but still need international protection. In the countries covered by this report, versions of complementary protection include subsidiary protection, for those fleeing generalized violence or armed conflict, and temporary protection, for those who are fleeing from war or natural disasters and are part of a migration influx.

Geographical Limitation to Refugee Commitment. A country that signs the 1951 Refugee Convention or 1967 Protocol Relating to Refugee Status Determination can maintain the “geographical limitation” that originally limited the nation’s treaty obligations to refugees fleeing from “events in Europe.”

Internally displaced person (IDP). An IDP is forced to flee home yet able to remain in his/her country. UNHCR facilitates protection and support for IDPs because of its expertise on displacement.

Durable solutions. There are three durable solutions, that is, comprehensive and long-term remedies for one’s refugee situation: voluntary repatriation, local integration, and third country resettlement. Voluntary repatriation is the preferred option since it signifies that the original cause for displacement has subsided to the point that a safe, dignified return home is possible. However, with the threat of continued persecution or ongoing conflict, it may be best for the refugee to remain in the country of first asylum if the person is welcomed by the host country and can integrate with safety and dignity. If remaining in the country of first asylum is not viable because of local resistance, lack of protection or economic capacity, or another reason, resettlement to a third country is sometimes the most realistic solution.

Refugee. A refugee is one who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

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TURKEY

Fatih Özer, Head of Response Department, AFAD, Government of Turkey
Makbule Yalin, Assistant Specialist, Department of Strategy Development, AFAD

Burcu Keriman Erdoğan, Counselor, Embassy of the Republic of Turkey (Washington, DC)

Dr. O. Can Ünver, Former Director General of Ministry of Labor and Security, Turkey

Mgr. Yusuf Sağ, General Patriarchal Vicar of Syriac Catholic Church in Turkey, President Caritas Turkey

Mon. Luis Pelatre, Apostolic Vicar of Latin Catholics in Istanbul

Belinda Mumcu, Program Coordinator, Caritas Turkey

Chiara R. Ambaldi Guidasci, Project Coordinator, Caritas Turkey

Linda Samardžić, Director, ICMC Resettlement Service Center (Istanbul) and her staff

Rev. Andres Calleja, SDB, Basilique Cathedrale Saint-Espirit

Ceren Ozturk, Helsinki Citizens Assembly

Ambassador Ross Wilson, Chargé, U.S. Embassy Ankara

Wendy Nassmacher, Political Officer Human Rights, U.S. Embassy Ankara

John Speaker, Deputy Economic Officer, U.S. Embassy Ankara

Carol Batchelor, UNHCR Representative in Turkey

Karim Atassi, UNHCR Deputy Country Director

Brenda Goddard, UNHCR Sr. Protection Officer (Ankara)

Vito Trani, UNHCR Head of Office/Senior Field Coordinator, Gaziantep, Southeast Turkey

Zeyrev Iclâl İnciözü, UNHCR Assistant Community Services Officer, Gaziantep, Southeast Turkey

Elif Selen Ay, UNHCR Istanbul Office Representative

Anne Kindrachuk, UNICEF Emergency Specialist

Meere Sethi, IOM Chief of Mission

Yelda Devlet Karapinar, IOM Project Expert

Mazen Aboul Hosn, IOM Psychosocial Officer

Anastasia Sağlam, IOM Project Development and Implementation Unit

Ibrahim Cem Kurt, Project Coordinator, ASAM (Gaziantep)

Gizem Demirci Al Kadah, Project Coordinator, ASAM (Istanbul)

Anil Kangal, Deputy Program Manager, International Medical Corp, Turkey

Afag Mammadli, Syrian Emergency Response Program Coordinator, International Blue Crescent

Ümit Algan, Manager, Middle East Peace Research Centre and staff

BULGARIA

Major General (retired) Vassil Vassiliev Varbanov, Vice President, State Agency for Refugees

Yotko Andreev, Director Migration, Ministry of the Interior

State Agency for Child Protection

Mr. Lubimov, Warden, Lyubimets Pre-Removal Center

Bishop Christo Proykov, President of the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church in Bulgaria and

Catholic Apostolic Exarch

Emanouil Patashev, General Secretary, Caritas Bulgaria

Radosveta Hadjieva, Migration Service Coordinator, Caritas Bulgaria

Svetlana Gyoreva, Policy Officer, Caritas Bulgaria

Ivan Cheresharov, Coordinator, Caritas Bulgaria

Honorable Marcie Berman Ries, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy of Sofia

Justin Heung, Political/Economic Officer

Joseph Krinock, Political, Economic Officer

Dr. Nadezhda Todorovska, MD, Deputy Director General, Bulgarian Red Cross

Mariana Stoyanova, Program Manager Refugee-Migrant Service, Bulgarian Red Cross

Diliana Markova, Project Coordinator, Judiciary Capacity Building, Norway Grants (Sofia)

Roland Francois Weil, UNHCR Representative

Nadya Foundation

Bulgarian Council for Refugees and Migrants

GREECE

Major, Public Order & Citizen Protection, Greece

Mr. Panagiotis Nikas, Director, 1st Reception Service

Eleni A. Petraki, Assistant Director, Regional Asylum Office of Attiki, Asylum Service

Mr. Konstantellis, Harbor Master

Fr. Andreas, Vice President, Caritas Hellas

Nikos Voutsinos, General Secretary Caritas Athens

Evelyn Karastamati, Coordinator, Caritas Hellas

Anastasia Tanja Zwack Georgakopoulou, Liaison Manager, ICMC (Athens)

Suzanne Lawrence, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy Athens

Amy Scanlon, Deputy Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy Athens

Eleftheris Konstantopoulos, Associate Information Analysis Liaison Officer, UNHCR/ICMC

Mariella Michailidou, Associate Community Services Officer, UNHCR/ICMC

Tatiana Gazi, Associate Asylum Officer (AAO), UNHCR/ICMC

Alexandros Tzenos, Associate Information Officer, UNHCR/ICMC

Eftalia Pappa, Project Leader, Ecumenical Refugee Program

Sandy Protogerou, Legal Advisor to Board of Directors, Greek Council of Refugees, and staff.

Dina Vardaramatou, SSW, Athens Project Coordinator Praksis Open Reception Center for Youth

UNITED STATES

Anne Richard, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM)

Joseph Livingston, Program Officer, PRM

Nicole E. Gallagher, Bulgaria Desk Officer, U.S. Department of State

Andrea Samuelson, Office of Europe, Central Asia, and the Americas, PRM

Daryl Grisgraber, Refugees International

Anna Greene, International Rescue Committee

Jana Mason, Senior Advisor External Relations and Government Affairs, UNHCR

Bill Frelick, Human Rights Watch

GENEVA

Vincent Cochetel, Director, Europe Bureau, UNHCR

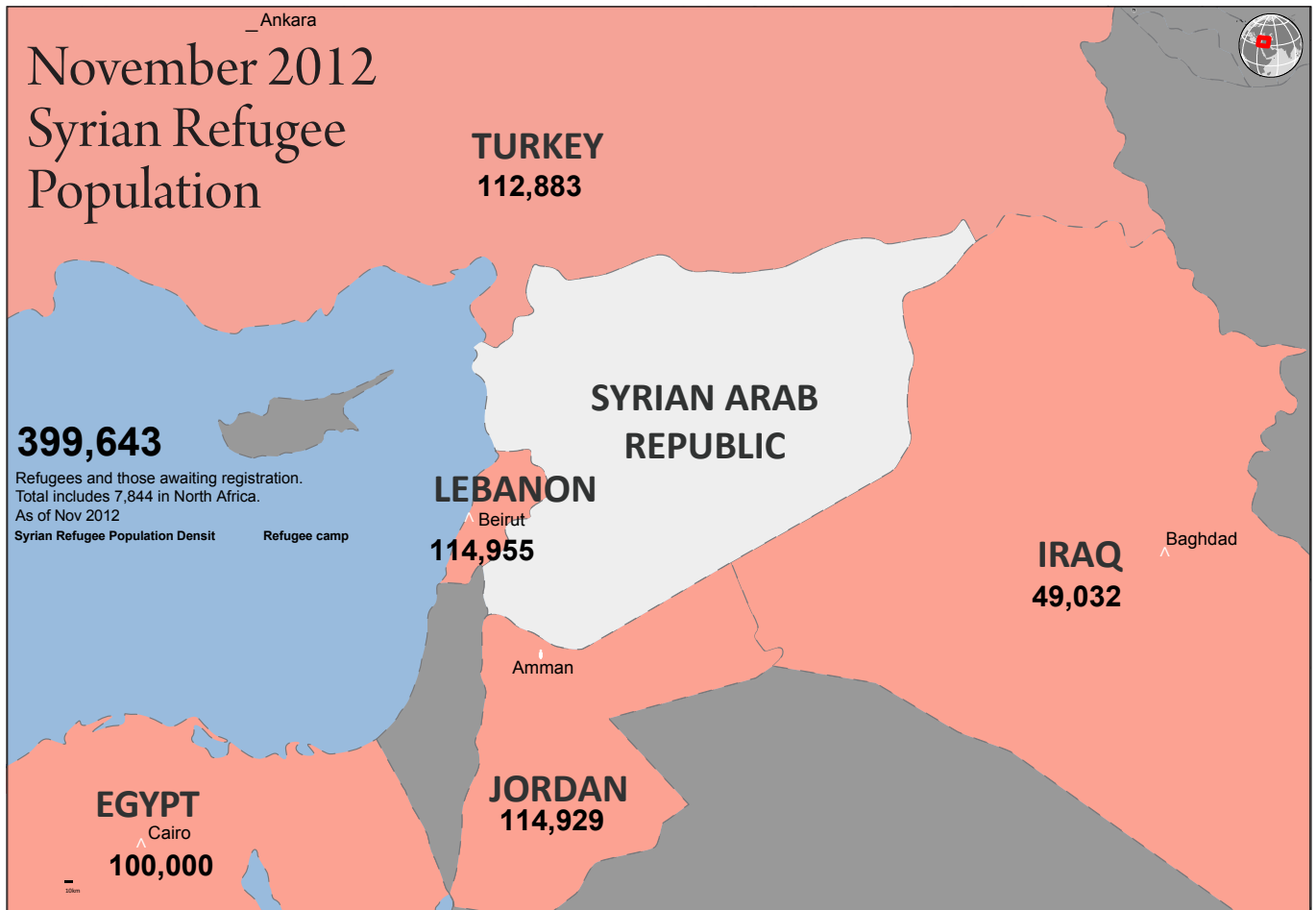
Diane Goodman, Deputy Director, Europe Bureau, UNHCR

Melike Trigg, Associate Liaison Officer, Europe Bureau, UNHCR

LONDON

Russell Chapman, Photographer, <http://russellchapman.wordpress.com/2014/12/14/syria-interesting-developments/>

APPENDIX: The Syrian



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Sources: <http://data.unhcr.org/>

T I M E

March 2011

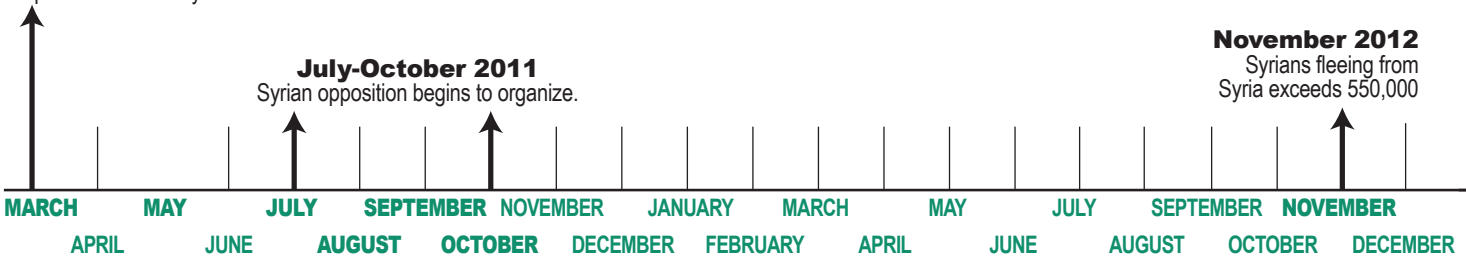
Peaceful protests begin in Damascus and Deraa, Syria, and spread throughout the country. Government responds with security crackdown.

July-October 2011

Syrian opposition begins to organize.

November 2012

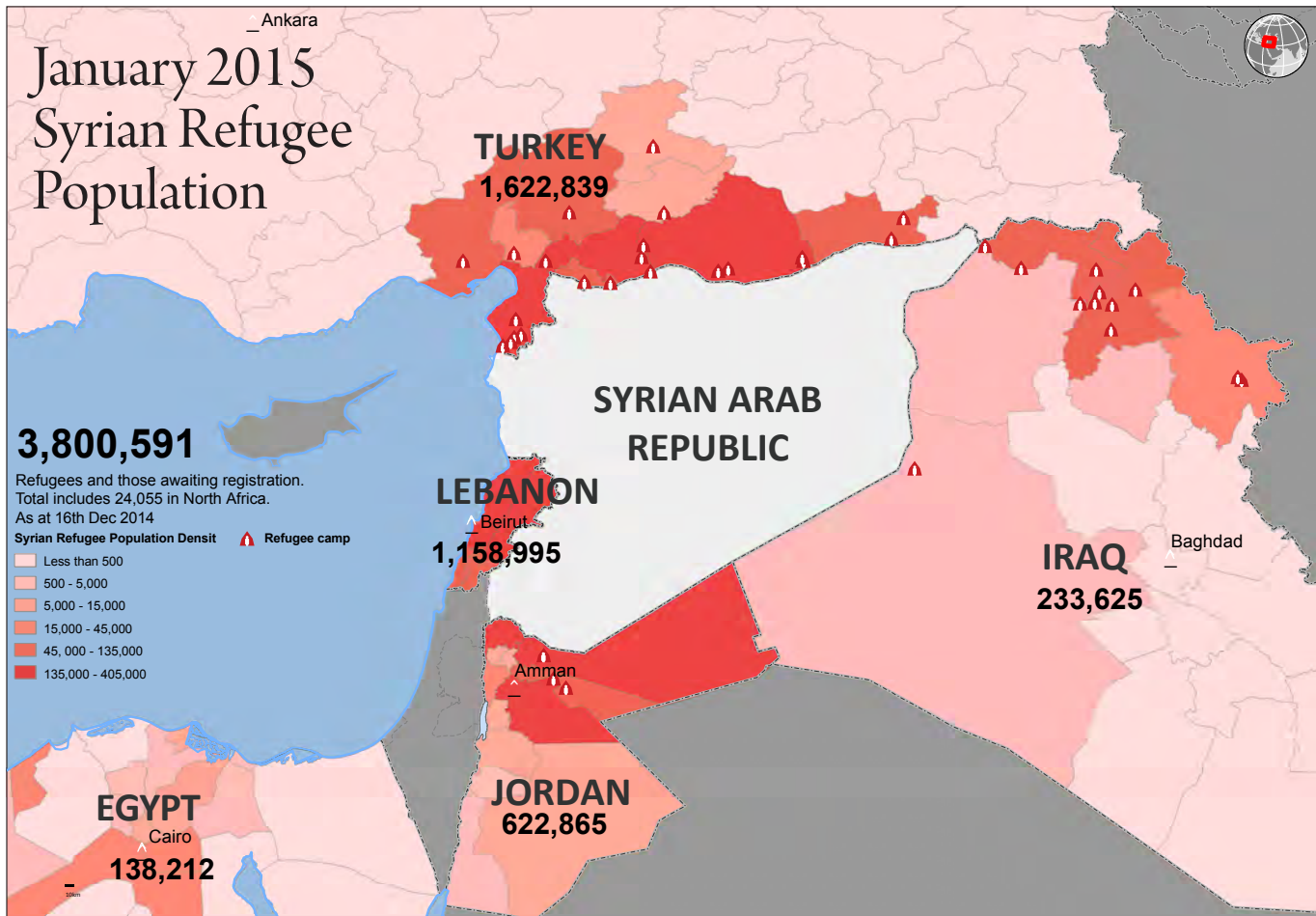
Syrians fleeing from Syria exceeds 550,000



May 2011
Turkey opens first refugee camp.

2011.2012

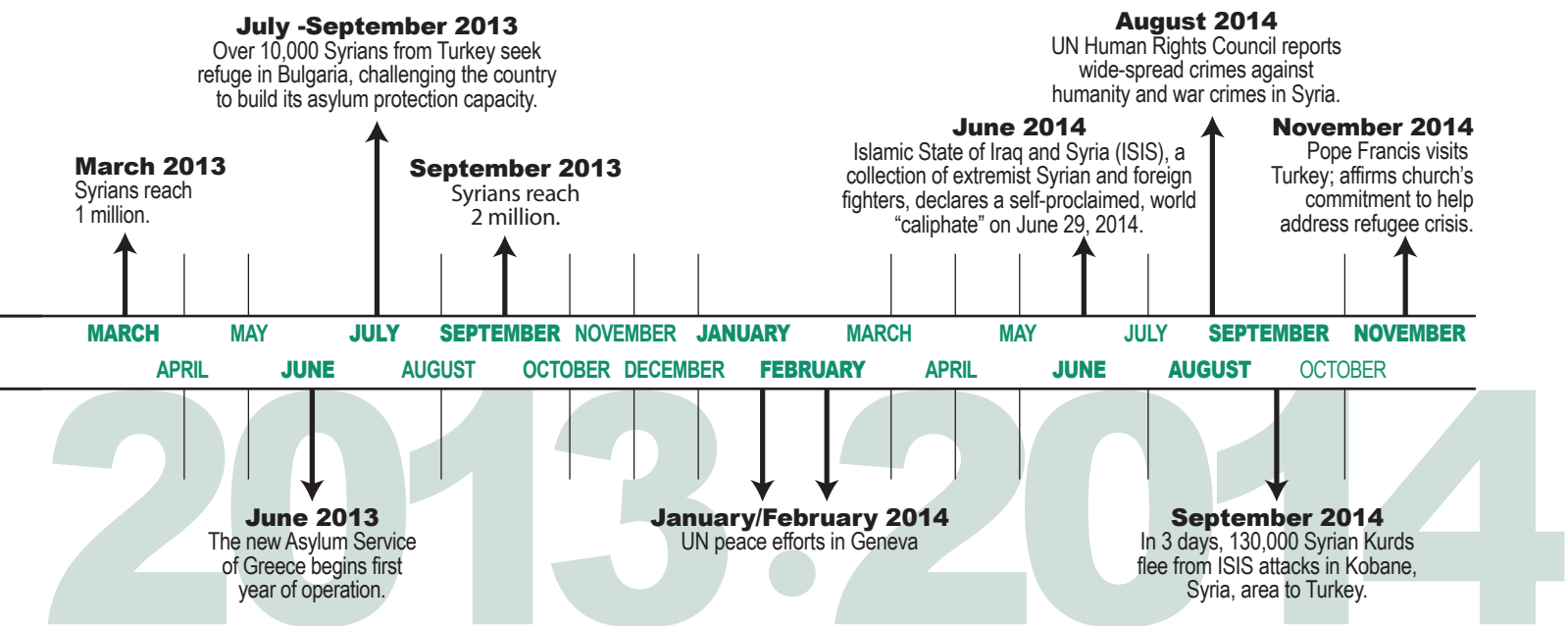
Refugee Crisis Unfolds



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Sources: <http://data.unhcr.org/>

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Endnotes

¹ *USCCB Delegation to the Middle East Report*, Committee on Migration/USCCB, October 2012, <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/fact-finding-mission-reports/> [accessed 15 December 2015]; “Syria Refugees Inter-Agency Regional Update,” UNHCR, 25 January 2015 [available upon request] (over 3.8 million Syrian refugees; over 85% non-camp, urban refugees); *Global Asylum Trends Report January-June 2014*, UNHCR, 9 October 2014, p. 3 (Syria largest sending country for asylum applicants); “Syrians largest refugee group after Palestinians: UN,” *Reuters*, 1 January 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/07/us-mideast-crisis-syria-refugees-idUSKBN0KG0AZ20150107> [accessed 12 January 2015]; *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*, UNHCR, January 2014 (52% of Syrian refugees are children) <http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria> [accessed 13 January 2015]; “Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan: Humanitarian Snapshot,” OCHA, November/December 2014 (IDP statistics); Megan Price, Anita Gohdes, and Patrick Ball, *Updated Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic*, Human Rights Data Analysis Group Commissioned by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 2014, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/HRDAG_UpdatedReportAug2014.pdf [accessed 14 December 2014].

² “Raids by ISIS Push Flood of Refugees Into Turkey,” *NY Times*, Ben Hubbard, 22 September 2014 <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/23/world/europe/over-130000-flee-syria-for-turkey-in-wake-of-isis-raids.html>. [accessed 16 December 2014]. Note that some 190,000 Syrians have fled from the Kobane area in Syria to Turkey since September 2014. “Syria Refugees Inter-Agency Regional Update,” UNHCR, 16 December 2014 [available upon request]. The facts about ISIS development in this paragraph come from timelines compiled by UNHCR, BBC, and CNN. See <http://www.unhcr.org/5245a72e6.pdf>, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995> and <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/08/world/isis-fast-facts/> [accessed 14 December 2014]. Regarding human rights abuses by the Syrian government and ISIS see *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, United Nations General Assembly Human Rights Council, 13 August 2014, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICI-Syria/Pages/IndependentInternationalCommission.aspx> [accessed 15 January 2015].

³ Refugee statistics in this paragraph and the three following it were provided by AFAD at a meeting with them and were taken from UNHCR sources. See *Global Appeal 2015 Update: Turkey*, UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/5461e60c52.html> (for non-Syrian, non-Iraqi numbers), and “UNHCR reports sharp increase in number of Iraqis fleeing to Jordan and Turkey,” UNHCR, 23 September 2014 (for 103,000 Iraqis), <http://www.unhcr.org/542148839.html> [accessed 14 December 2014]. The source for Turkey’s size and population is “Turkey,” *World Factbook*, CIA, 2014, see <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html> [accessed 15 January 2015].

⁴ Turkish officials said Turkey had spent some \$4 billion by the time of the delegation’s September 2014 visit. The number has reportedly risen since. “Turkey Spends \$4.5 Billion for Syrian Refugees—Update,” *World Bulletin*, <http://www.worldbulletin.net/turkey/147700/turkey-spends-45-billion-on-syrian-refugees-updated> [accessed 15 January 2015]. For 29% funding of refugees’ needs in Turkey see “Syria Regional Response Plan—RRP6 (all agencies): Funding snapshot as at 5 December 2014,” UNHCR, 5 December 2014 (available upon request).

⁵ See also “Protection” section of “Turkey,” *Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP)*, June 2014, U.S. Department of State, p. 384, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/226849.pdf> [accessed 15 December 2014].

⁶ According to Turkey’s new migration law, when fully implemented those who have applied for or received international protection and their families gain access to primary and secondary education. If “in need,” they have access to social assistance and services and to medical insurance that will provide for health care. Conditional refugee applicants and recipients can apply for a work permit six months after filing their protection claim, and people receiving subsidiary protection potentially have the right to work in Turkey (although the scope of that right can be limited). (Art. 89) According to the new migration statute, the details regarding the duration and benefits related to temporary protection of a large influx are stipulated to by the council of Ministers (Art. 91). See “The Law on Foreigners and International Protection,” Republic of Turkey, Law No. 6458, date of adoption 4 April 2013, in force 4 April 2014 (printed in *Official Gazette*, No. 28615, 11 April 2014). <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5167fbb20.html> [accessed 14 January 2015].

⁷ Education statistics are from interviews and materials provided by UNHCR and UNICEF.

⁸ “The Law on Foreigners and International Protection,” (Turkey), Articles 41 (2) (“Long Term Residence Permit”), 62 (“Conditional Refugees”), and 87 (“Voluntary Return”), Articles 61 (“Refugees”), 62 (“Conditional Refugees”), 63 (“Subsidiary Protection”), and 91 (“Temporary Protection”). Further information about the “geographical limitation” can be found in the UNHCR Handbook. See, *Handbook and Guidelines on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, UNHCR December 2011, HCR/1P/4/ENG/REV.3, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4f33c8d92.html> [accessed 14 January 2015].

⁹ The Turkish government found that 92% of Syrians surveyed planned to return. *Syrian Refugees in Turkey, 2013: Field Survey Results*, Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), Republic of Turkey, 2013 (AFAD provided written materials to the delegation). In a meeting with ASAM, their staff said that 67% of Syrians recently surveyed planned to return.

¹⁰ UNHCR also reports that Lebanon has “adopted restrictions for Syrians wishing to enter Lebanon at its border crossing.” See “Syria Refugees Inter-Agency Regional Update,” UNHCR, 16 December 2014 (available upon request).

¹¹ “Governments at Geneva Meeting Agree to Take in 100,000 Syrian Refugees,” UNHCR, 9 December 2014, at <http://www.unhcr.org/548737926.html> [accessed 10 December 2014].

¹² Statistics were provided by ICMC.

¹³ Law On Asylum And Refugees, Articles 12 (refugee and humanitarian status), Article 11 (temporary protection) and Article 7 (asylum), Bulgarian Parliament, In force from 1 December 2002, Prom., State Gazette No. 54, 31 May 2002, amend., SG No. 31, 8 April 2005, amend., SG No. 30, 11 April 2006, amend., SG No. 52, 29 June 2007. See <http://www.aref.government.bg/?cat=25> [accessed 14 December 2014]. (Note that Bulgaria’s asylum status is a holdover from before it became a signatory to the refugee convention. It grants asylum to those who champion international rights and freedoms.) For facts about Bulgaria see “Bulgaria,” *World Factbook*, CIA, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html> [accessed 15 January 2015].

¹⁴ *Bulgaria as a Country of Asylum: UNHCR Observations on the Current Situation of Asylum in Bulgaria*, UNHCR, 2 January 2014, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/52c598354.html> [accessed 14 January 2015]. See also *Bulgaria as a Country of Asylum: UNHCR Observations on the Current Situation of Asylum in Bulgaria*, UNHCR, April 2014, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/534cd85b4.pdf> [accessed 15 January 2015]. Also see *Containment Plan: Bulgaria’s Pushbacks and Detention of Syrian and Other Asylum Seekers and Migrants*, Human Rights Watch, April 2014, www.hrw.org (enter “Containment Plan” into search on HRW website) [accessed 14 December 2014].

¹⁵ See “Protection” section of “Bulgaria,” *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2014, U.S. Department of State, p. 112, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/226849.pdf> [accessed 14 December 2015].

¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, the statistics in this paragraph are provided by Bulgarian government officials.

¹⁷ See also *Where is my home? Homelessness and Access to Housing among Asylum-Seekers, Refugees and Persons with International Protection in Bulgaria*, UNHCR, June 2013, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/51b57c864.html> [accessed 14 December 2015].

¹⁸ “Bulgaria’s Dual Refugee Controversies: Rosovo and Human Rights Watch’s Report,” *Sofia Globe*, 1 May 2014, <http://sofiaglobe.com/2014/05/01/bulgarias-dual-refugees-controversies-rosovo-and-human-rights-watches-report/> [accessed 17 December 2014].

¹⁹ Refugee facts provided by UNHCR. For facts about Greece see “Greece,” *World Factbook*, CIA, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gr.html> [accessed 14 December 2015].

²⁰ See the law regarding Greek protections and benefits. Greece: Law No. 3907 of 2011 on the establishment of an Asylum Service and a First Reception Service, transposition into Greek legislation of Directive 2008/115/EC “on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third country nationals” and other provisions. [Greece], 26 January 2011, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4da6ee7e2.html>, [accessed 7 December 2014].

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *M.S.S. v. Belgium*, ECtHR 2011a, <http://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/en/content/ecthr-mss-v-belgium-and-greece-gc-application-no-3069609> [accessed 17 December 2014].

²³ *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*, UNHCR, November 2014, <http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/executive-summary.html/executive-summary> [accessed 14 December 2014].

²⁴ Regarding complementary protection see UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Conclusion on the Provision of International Protection Including Through Complementary Forms of Protection*, 7 October 2005, No. 103 (LVI) - 2005, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/43576e292.html> [accessed 14 December 2014]. Regarding the “geographical limitation” see endnote 8 above. Regarding IDP see “Internally Displaced People,” UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c146.html> [accessed 14 December 2014]. The definition of durable solutions is based on Anastasia Brown and Todd Scribner, “Unfulfilled Promises, Future Possibilities,” *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2014) p. 102. For the refugee definition see Handbook and Guidelines on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, UNHCR, December 2011, HCR/1P/4/ENG/REV.3, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4f33c8d92.html> [accessed 14 January 2015].

²⁵ This timeline is taken from timelines created about Syria by UNHCR, BBC, and CNN. See <http://www.unhcr.org/5245a72e6.pdf>, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>, and <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/08/world/isis-fast-facts/> [accessed 14 December 2014]. The September 2014 Turkey influx in Turkey, the July-September 2013 influx in Bulgaria, and the new asylum program in Greece are described earlier in the report. For timeline entry November 2012, UNHCR said 399,643 registered Syrian refugees were in region by November 2012. In October 2012, stakeholders told Committee on Migration that an estimated figure for all Syrian refugees was 550,000.

²⁶ Emmer McCarthy, “Pope Urges a Lonely, Self-Absorbed Europe to Recover Its Soul,” Vatican Radio. 25 November /2014. http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/25/pope_urges_self-absorbed_europe_to_recover_its_soul/1112330 [accessed 14 December 2014].

“This tent is more beautiful because you are in it,” were a six-year boy’s welcoming words as the delegation entered this “child friendly space” in Turkey. Such spaces allow children to be children and support children’s mental health, healing and resilience. Photo by the delegation.



“We cannot allow the Mediterranean
to become a vast cemetery!”

—Pope Francis to the
European Parliament calling
for a united response
to address Syrian crisis²⁶



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Migration and Refugee Services

3211 4th Street, NE
Washington, DC 20017
www.usccb.org/mrs