

# New England Journal of Public Policy

Volume 30

Issue 2 *Special Issue on Migration*

Article 9


9-21-2018

## Syrian Refugees in Europe: Migration Dynamics and Political Challenges

Leila Hudson

*University of Arizona, Tucson*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp>

 Part of the [European Law Commons](#), [Immigration Law Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Migration Studies Commons](#), [Near and Middle Eastern Studies Commons](#), and the [Public Policy Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Hudson, Leila (2018) "Syrian Refugees in Europe: Migration Dynamics and Political Challenges," *New England Journal of Public Policy*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp/vol30/iss2/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in New England Journal of Public Policy by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact [library.uasc@umb.edu](mailto:library.uasc@umb.edu).

## **Syrian Refugees in Europe: Migration Dynamics and Political Challenges**

**Leila Hudson**

*University of Arizona, Tucson*

*After 2011 the Syrian conflict caused growing numbers of residents to flee to escape escalating regime brutality and deteriorating economic conditions. In addition to a population of up to eight million internally displaced residents, at least four million Syrians fled to neighboring Arab states and Turkey. Conditions in those countries ranged from desperate to uncomfortable, and between 2014 and 2016 up to a million refugees continued on to seek asylum in Europe. In addition to the trauma of displacement the refugees experienced, the migration left traces on the host and transit countries in the form of economic and infrastructural challenges, xenophobia, and changing regulation of borders, asylum, and citizenship parameters. The dynamics of unsustainable precarity, closing borders, and increasingly hostile receptions in a range of countries encouraged Syrians to keep moving west. This movement put pressure on the asylum regime of the European Union as well as Balkan states and allowed the government of Turkey to use the refugees for political purposes.*

---

**T**he Syrian conflict, which started in 2011, provoked a mass migration of refugees. During 2011 and 2012, massive and widespread popular demonstrations for democratic reforms in the Baath-dominated Syrian Arab Republic spread from the southern region around Deraa and the central city of Homs to localities throughout the country, including parts of all major cities. The regime of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad responded to these demonstrations with the proverbial iron fist. Demonstrators, young men from rebel strongholds, and activists were rounded up and tortured in prison or slaughtered in their homes. By 2012, areas of most major cities in Syria were subject to house-to-house raids, the arbitrary detention of activists and other civilians, and eventually mortar and missile attacks from helicopter gunships.<sup>1</sup> Regime atrocities spiked in August 2013 with chemical weapons attacks on civilian areas in the suburbs of Damascus that killed about fourteen hundred civilians. When the international community failed to respond to this provocation, aerial attacks continued—though usually with ordinary munitions and “barrel bombs”—because high-profile weapons of mass destruction were now subject to international diplomatic negotiations. The massive and brutal response by the government to widespread calls for democratic reform dislodged much of the population of Syria. Between 2013 and 2018 the situation continued to deteriorate with Iran and Russia propping up the Syrian regime and allowing the decimation of the society to continue at a large scale. The degradation of the organized opposition to the regime into feuding and increasingly extremist rivals armed and funded by regional sponsors did little to improve the situation, while the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) gained and lost swathes of territory in eastern Syria at incalculable cost to residents.

Before 2011, Syria had been the world’s second-largest host country for refugees. Palestinians who were exiled in 1948 and 1967 formed large communities inside Syria. During the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and subsequent war, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis

*Leila Hudson is an associate professor of modern Middle East culture and political economy at the University of Arizona.*

sought refuge in Syria.<sup>2</sup> In addition, communities of Sudanese, Somalis, and Yemenis were to be found throughout the country. During the time of the First World War, Armenians fleeing genocide in the Ottoman Empire and Kurds fleeing persecution in the Turkish Republic had also made Syria their home. In contrast, by 2015, Syria was the world's largest producer of refugees and one of the world's largest populations of internally displaced people.

From 2014 to 2016, hundreds of thousands of Syrians reached the borders of Europe seeking asylum. During that time and in the preceding two years, the flow of Syrian refugees had enough force to challenge European Union structures and solidarity. Only through much effort and the sacrifice of European values did it slow by the spring of 2016. The movement of Syrians fleeing the effects of war, at first within Syria, then into neighboring countries, swept up millions who sought to avoid the fate of the five hundred thousand killed and more than a million injured in the most brutal war of the twenty-first century to date. But limited opportunities and dwindling resources in the neighboring Arab countries and Turkey accelerated the movement toward Europe as refugees who had sought havens in the Middle East region found that living conditions had become expensive and unsustainable.<sup>3</sup>

The migration of refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic that would challenge the European Union's commitment to the 1951 Geneva Protocol on Refugees occurred in several phases. Internal displacement came first, as growing numbers of people sought respite from the effects of regime reprisals against activists and their urban strongholds and continued as the war developed into a multiparty sectarian conflict with interventions from outside parties that resulted in large-scale territorial fragmentation of the country. The second phase of the migration, which accounted eventually for four to five million refugees, consisted of legal but difficult migration to neighboring countries throughout 2014 when Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt effectively closed their borders.<sup>4</sup> In camps and urban areas, Syrians sought to rebuild their lives with international aid and by resettling into more stable economies than Syria's but with little success. Weak economies, host society exploitation of vulnerable displaced labor, and lack of formal protections by international law prevailed against the refugees. Refuge in Turkey, with a "temporary guest" status, which does not meet the Geneva protocol standards, allowed a Syrian community to take root in Turkey's economy without formal residency or labor permits, and with the added obstacle of a language difference. But for hundreds of thousands of Syrians, Turkey became a route to Europe. The open-door policy of Angela Merkel's Germany and other liberal asylum regimes, particularly in Sweden, drew Syrians north, especially after 2013. By spring 2015, an Aegean migratory route from the western coast of Turkey to the easternmost Greek islands eclipsed the North African Central Mediterranean smuggling route from North Africa to Italy. More than half a million people had traversed the Aegean and the Balkan corridor by the winter of 2015.

## **Internally Displaced Persons in Syria**

By the summer of 2011, casualties in Syrian cities had mounted. In addition to the usual disappearance of antigovernment activists, protesters were being shot openly in the street, and civilians, particularly young men, were subject to roundups from which they might or might not return to their homes. The rapid and indiscriminate escalation of regime violence in areas whose populations leaned toward the opposition and harbored Free Syrian Army elements made life precarious for all civilians. Mortar and aerial attacks on hospitals, marketplaces, and even schools were documented as early as 2012. For many Syrians, displacement began when they left their homes and made a temporary move to another, safer neighborhood where they found shelter with family members or on the properties of relatives and friends. The number of internally displaced persons is hard to estimate because by definition they remain within the confines of the war-torn country with limited access to humanitarian and

international aid agencies. It is estimated, however, that between seven and eight million Syrians are internally displaced. As research shows, internal displacement is extremely disruptive to people's lives. It has serious consequences for their livelihood and income, nutritional status and access to food, and access to education and healthcare, and it exacerbates the economic devastation that can be expected from war situations.<sup>5</sup> Because of the extreme conditions created by internal displacement, many displaced persons sought longer-term refuge in neighboring countries.

### **Legal Migration to Neighboring (Arab) Countries**

For millions of Syrians attempting to survive the war, the next step after internal displacement was legal migration to neighboring Arab countries. Israel-Palestine and the wealthy Persian Gulf Arab countries did not admit Syrian refugees. Because Israel was still at war with Syria and effectively controlled the external borders of the Palestinian territories, refuge there was unthinkable. The Arab Gulf countries had a long history of labor migration, which they controlled by regulating entry and work permission for Syrians and other Arabs. These pre-existing barriers to entry, which generally allowed Syrians to travel to and work in the Gulf countries only if they came with capital collateral and the sponsorship of Gulf citizens or governments, remained in place and effectively blocked any new migration of Syrian refugees to their countries. In some instances, Gulf governments and private donors contributed financially, but in ways that have been perceived as exacerbating and prolonging the war through a patchwork of support to the fragmented and increasingly sectarian Sunni Islamic opposition.

Legal migration to the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey and to regional Arab countries in North Africa was an immediate response to the lack of security and an attempt to establish a more permanent and stable life than one could have as an internally displaced person within Syria. In Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Algeria, Syrians could escape the fighting and economic stagnation in Syria and apply their professional and trade skills and their Arabic language skills to education and employment. As one informant reported, in 2011 and 2012, going to Egypt was like going from one province in Syria to another—no visa was necessary and the passport check was perfunctory. Middle-class Syrians sought to pick up the professions or businesses or education they had had to abandon in Syria, and poor Syrians could expect to receive international assistance in refugee camps just across the borders.

Life in the neighboring Arab countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt and elsewhere in North Africa, however, was difficult for the displaced Syrians. With about one in four of the newcomers residing in camps, registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other aid organizations, and receiving forms of international assistance, especially food, shelter, and medical care, the camps were soon overcrowded and the infrastructure increasingly challenged as the host populations blamed Syrian refugees for the exacerbation of pre-existing economic problems. For example, the rapidly growing Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, located in a place where there had been no previous habitation, became the fourth largest population center in the kingdom with dangerous consequences for the country's infrastructure and water system in particular. In Lebanon's refugee camps, aid workers were hard-pressed to provide adequate food, shelter, and clothing for the growing numbers of refugees who had assembled by 2013.

Life in cities was better for those with some resources, though it was fraught with great difficulties as well.<sup>6</sup> The movement of Syrians into cities such as Amman, Jordan, and Tripoli, Lebanon, squeezed their economies.<sup>7</sup> Rent soared while wages dropped and already high levels of unemployment among the local population escalated as Syrians entered the

countries desperate for work. Infrastructure, especially water and waste systems, were stressed.<sup>8</sup> The three-quarters of Syrian refugees trying to make new lives in the cities faced many obstacles, including the bureaucracy involved in obtaining residency permits, housing shortages that resulted in families camping in open commercial properties or living in the streets, and, for those lucky enough to get a job, difficult working conditions, such as the expectation that they work twelve-to-fourteen-hour shifts for much less than nonrefugee local workers would accept. What little food aid reached Syrians who registered with the United Nations and other charitable organizations dwindled away as NGOs budgets disappeared and their caseloads grew. By 2013, seeing graft and corruption among NGOs, refugees had grown cynical about their role in the economy. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian students were unable to complete their schooling because already overcrowded local schools would not accept them. Also, the few schools run by the Syrian Opposition Coalition that were funded by donations from Gulf and North African countries were overcrowded. Their administration was expensive and corrupt, adding to instability and trauma pupils and their families were experiencing.

By 2014, Jordan was hosting more than half a million Syrians, and Lebanon more than a million, which made up a quarter of the country's population. Another hundred thousand, all of whom were Shiites, Kurds, or Bedouins, sought shelter in Iraq. During the summer of 2013, those who had fled to Egypt were suddenly unwelcome when the Muslim Brotherhood government of Mohamed Morsi, which had been sympathetic to Syrians, fell. Under the regime of General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, Syrians, often seen as supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood, became the targets of hostility and suspicion. Consequently, Syrians in Egypt considered heading across the Mediterranean to Europe.

Also by 2014, as many as three million Syrians were living in the neighboring Arab countries. Their circumstances varied from the squalor of the refugee camp and a barely sustainable lifestyle in the cities to the more acceptable circumstances in which members of the upper middle classes and professional classes were able to live. Most Syrians found life in the neighboring Arab countries to be little better than life in their own war-torn country. They were more assured of security of life than they had been in Syria, but they were not yet assured of security of shelter, livelihood, and education.<sup>9</sup>

## **Syrian Refugees in Turkey**

Northern Syrians had been crossing back and forth across the Turkey-Syrian border since about 2009, when relations between the Turkish AK Party and the pre-revolt regime of Bashar Assad had been warm and cooperative. Thus, when the war reached into the northern parts of the country, many Syrians headed to the Turkish border for safety. Despite the language barrier for the vast majority of Syrians, Turkey would ultimately host up to three million Syrian refugees. Turkey's population of eighty million and its relatively prosperous economy (with the world's seventeenth largest GDP) would accommodate more Syrians than any other country in the region. Though the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey was double the number in Lebanon, Syrians residing in Turkey constituted only 3 percent of the population. Syrian quarters grew rapidly in the southern cities of Turkey, while neighborhoods such as Basmane in Izmir and the Fatih quarter of Istanbul were visibly transformed by the newcomers. Istanbul's Aksaray, with its Syrian grocery stores and numerous Syrian restaurants, became known as "Little Syria."<sup>10</sup>

By 2013, when the war in Syria spread to Aleppo and Damascus and the war between ISIS/Daesh and Syria's northern Kurds had culminated in the siege and destruction of Kobani, ever greater numbers of Syrians fled to Turkey to start new lives. By 2014, the number of Syrian Arabs and Kurds living and working in Turkey's cities outnumbered those

living in the refugee camps on the border by a ratio of at least four to one. But Turkey did not consider Syrian refugees to be asylum seekers nor did it grant them refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Conventions. Instead they were seen as temporary guests of indeterminate status. Many Syrians preferred to float freely in the Turkish economy and feared being registered and possibly confined to refugee camps.

Two more factors accelerated the number of Syrians entering Turkey before the borders closed during the first days of 2016. With the closure of the Egyptian, Lebanese, and Jordanian borders during 2013 and 2014, new asylum seekers could choose to go only to Turkey. Also, large numbers of Syrian refugees who had fled initially to neighboring Arab countries were burning through their savings and had few prospects for living sustainably in Jordan and Lebanon. As the disenchantment with the prospect of life in neighboring Arab countries grew stronger in 2013 and 2014, more and more people began to consider illegal migration to Europe. The Central Mediterranean route was long, dangerous, and difficult to access from Sisi's Egypt. Consequently, the comparatively shorter and presumably safer Aegean route from Turkey's western coast to the islands of Greece became much more popular.

### **Seeking Refuge in Europe**

By 2014, Syrian refugees were making their way to the Mediterranean coast of Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt to join boatloads of North and sub-Saharan Africans making their way to Europe. Liberal asylum policies and welfare states attracted those for whom life in Syria was intolerable, in neighboring Arab countries unsustainable, and in Turkey unintelligible. German chancellor Angela Merkel's welcoming rhetoric and reliably punctual German asylum hearings and family reunification policy were added incentives to head to Germany. Under the European Union's Schengen agreement and in the spirit of free movement within Europe, Europe's southern border gave easier access to the German and Scandinavian welfare states.<sup>11</sup>

The migration route that would come to be known as the Central Mediterranean route involved large decommissioned cargo ships departing from Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt run by smuggling gangs. Initially, the cost for an individual to gain passage on one of the "ghost ships" started at about three thousand euros. Syrians who were able to collect that sum and who reached North Africa found it easy to make contact with smugglers' representatives through networks of friends and acquaintances.<sup>12</sup> Many of these smuggling representatives and recruiters were themselves Syrian refugees working for local Egyptian or Libyan gangs who knew how to acquire cargo boats and bribe local officials, coast guard patrols, and police. Throughout 2014, the boats that made the weeklong journey from the African coast to Italy had a greater percentage of Syrians among their passengers. Passengers would put their money in escrow with third parties, relatives, or "insurance agencies" proposed by their smugglers. They would be collected in the dozens of isolated rural villas near the coast to await their unknown departure date. Then they would be crammed together on buses to drive up and down the coastal highways until they were able to make a nighttime rendezvous with a ghost ship just over the horizon. These bus rides foreshadowed the journey to come. Overcrowded, cramped, and increasingly subject to the threats and shouted orders of the smugglers' men, the passengers would wrap their papers and money in cellophane to prepare for the sea voyage, unwrapping them and hiding their life vests when stopped unexpectedly by police patrols. The bus journeys up and down the coast were designed to elude police and border control and allow the refugees to embark at points where such authorities were not present or had been bribed not to appear. During the week-long journey, passengers lost contact with their families and friends because the only telephone on board would be the

smugglers' Thuraya satellite phone. According to reports, Syrian passengers who paid thousands of euros were crowded onto the top deck of the ship, while African passengers were held below deck in an ugly race-based hierarchy. Starting in 2014, the number of deaths and accidents on these ghost ships began to rise dramatically, to the point where the European search-and-rescue NGO Mare Nostrum was unable to cope. Even the European frontier police Frontex was unable to secure the Southern European shoreline and international waters.

By 2015, many Syrian refugees began looking to Turkey as an alternate launching point for the trip to Europe. In contrast to the Central Mediterranean route, which involved large numbers of people (usually in the hundreds) boarding ghost ships for up to a week at sea, the Aegean route seemed to promise an easier sea journey in which refugees and migrants might hope to have more autonomy and control. The trip between the Turkish coast and the easternmost Greek island of Lesbos was short—in the best conditions, the voyage between Dikili in Izmir Province and the Lesbian capital of Mytilini could take as little as half an hour. The craft of choice became the small inflatable pontoon boat, and usually for much of the journey migrants were able to maintain contact with the outside world by cell phone rather than being dependent on their smugglers. On most trips, the migrants were not piloted or guided but left to their own fate on badly overcrowded and underfueled rafts with no crew. The short crossing could last for hours.

As the numbers of Syrian refugees on the Aegean route grew, the refugees were joined by a growing train of migrants from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and Lebanon. The Aegean trip soon became as perilous as the longer Central Mediterranean route that it supplanted. Smugglers who recruited their passengers in and around the cafés of Basmane Square in Izmir were working with a ruthless business model. The Aegean crossing cost each passenger initially two thousand dollars (half price for children).<sup>13</sup> At this rate, several times what it would have cost to fly safely from Turkey to the European Union, the small inflatable rafts were packed and overcrowded, making their passenger loads unsafe. Passengers crammed together and sitting on top of one another caused the boats to ride very low on the choppy waters of the Aegean Sea. To avoid consequences for the owners and crews of the vessels, the inflatable rafts were not staffed with crews. Usually the smugglers, after loading and overloading people on to the boat, would randomly assign one of the passengers, most often someone with no previous experience on the water, to man the outboard motor. The motors were used and recycled for maximum profit, and the boats loaded with only enough fuel to bring their terrified passengers almost, but not all of the way, to the Greek coast. Because most of the migrants did not know how to swim and were burdened with personal possessions, including cheap knock-off life vests and other makeshift personal safety devices, as many as six to twelve people a day died on the short crossing.

The rafts and boats that embarked at night from secret locations along the Turkish coast tried to avoid the Turkish and Greek coast guards. Sometimes the migrants who hoped to reach the Greek coast had to be rescued by one of the coast guards, and sometimes they were intercepted by a Turkish or Greek coast guard cutter and returned to Izmir, where they would try again and again as long as their funds and spirits held out. There are numerous accounts, however, of pilots of power boats claiming to be either the Turkish or especially the Greek coast guard who attempted to disable and strand many of the refugee boats by stealing their outboard motors, puncturing the boat with sharp sticks, or trying to capsize the boats. During 2015, despite the perils of the Aegean route, this avenue overtook the Central Mediterranean route with hundreds of thousands of Syrian migrants and others crossing by March 2016, when the route was effectively blocked by the EU-Turkish deal described in the next section.

Despite of the increasing number of drownings, hundreds of thousands of Syrians and others took the refugee path to reach EU territory in Greece. Fresh from its own financial

nightmare, Europe's most embattled economy and government was in no position to manage its own affairs, let alone those of thousands of desperate newcomers. Reception centers on the Greek islands descended into chaos despite the best efforts of many local and international volunteers and NGOs. Nevertheless, throughout 2015, most refugees were processed and sent by ferry to Athens to begin a journey by buses, taxis, and trains and on foot that would take them through the Balkans to their final destinations in Central or Northern Europe.

At first, Serbia, Hungary, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia regularly intercepted groups of undocumented Syrians and other migrants and sent them back to the country from which they had most recently come. But by the end of 2015, the practice at borders and transit countries was to push migrants toward rather than away from their destination to avoid their repeated attempts to cross each country. Migrants avoided Bulgaria and Romania, which were perceived to be hostile to Muslim asylum seekers and where refugees were routinely subjected to unlawful detention and bodily harm.<sup>14</sup> The westernmost route through Albania, Bosnia, and Montenegro was perceived as difficult because of challenging geographical features such as mountains and because the former Yugoslav republics and Albania were themselves the source of migrants and asylum seekers on their way to Western Europe. The principal migration route ran from Greece and the Republic of Macedonia through Serbia and into Hungary, the frontier member of the European Union and the Schengen agreement. During the fall of 2015, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban began narrowing the corridor by building a fence at the border between his country and Serbia and launching a campaign, with clear xenophobic undercurrents, to discourage migrants from entering. The effect of the blockage was to shift the route west from the Hungarian border to the Croatian border with Serbia, opening up a new route through Croatia and Slovenia into Austria and Germany. Depending on their resources and budgets, migrants could make their way to Austria and Germany by bus, train, or taxi. The many whose funds ran out were at the mercy of strangers and governments along their route.

Following in the example of Hungary, first Denmark and then other governments across Europe began to push back against the flow of migrants. Resistance to the migrants had peaked with the Paris attacks of November 2015 in which ISIS fighters killed 130 Parisians while using planted or forged Syrian passports at the site of the atrocities. Public opinion, including in the prime destinations of Sweden and Germany, began to sour. Wherever de facto migrant camps sprang up in Europe, volunteers stepped forward to help the travelers while others grumbled about the cost to their societies and welfare states. Xenophobic sentiments mounted.

In February 2016, the system began to break down.<sup>15</sup> When Austria closed its border, claiming that it would not become "a waiting room for Germany," Slovenia and Croatia did the same, refusing to be waiting rooms for Austria. Ultimately the countries of Eastern Europe, acting formally or informally through the Visegrád Association, agreed to fortify the Greek-Macedonian border, which was effectively closed during the last week of February 2016. It remains closed as of this writing. Fourteen thousand people camped out in the field at the Greek village of Idomeni on the Greek side of the Macedonian border as European leaders negotiated with Turkey for a return of migrants across the Aegean. The squalid de facto refugee camp at Idomeni temporarily replaced the "jungle" at Calais as Europe's largest favela. More than half of these late arrivals were women and children seeking to join husbands and fathers who had already arrived in Germany. They lived in tents swamped in mud, existing on handouts from various NGOs and the overwhelmed Greek state. While the camp at Idomeni was emptied in 2017, thousands of Syrians remain precariously sheltered in Greece, hoping to be granted asylum in the European Union and fearing that they might be returned to Turkey.



## **Political Challenges in the European Union**

The challenge to European solidarity and principles took the form of a deal proposed by Turkey's AK Party to the European Union in March 2016 that was ratified shortly thereafter by the member states of the European Union. According to the provisions of the deal, Turkey would readmit illegal migrants to Greece who arrived after March 20, 2016. In return, the European Union would provide an additional three billion euros to help Turkey meet the needs of the migrants. For every "illegal asylum seeker" returned to Turkey, one vetted by through the Turkish camp system would be sent to a European asylum from a refugee camp. Migrants and refugees and NGOs, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Save the Children, and Doctors Without Borders, objected to the deal on several counts. It seemed to provide for collective returns of migrants without new hearings for those seeking asylum. More important, Turkey was considered unsafe because non-European migrants returned to Turkey would not enjoy the protection of the 1951 Geneva Protocol on the Status of Refugees and its provision against nonrefoulement or repatriation to the country of danger. Some migrants, especially the non-Syrians most likely to be traded to Turkey, risked being sent back to their countries without fair hearings in Turkey. Others, particularly Kurds, were vulnerable to persecution in Turkey. Several NGOs briefly stopped providing services to Greek refugee camps on the grounds that they were no longer refugee camps but detention and deportation camps.

By April 2016, new arrivals to the Greek islands from Turkey dwindled to a trickle of fewer than a hundred a day. At the same time, shipwrecks on the Central Mediterranean route from Libya or Egypt to Italy may have claimed the lives of several hundred people as the Central Mediterranean smuggling route geared up again. As many as fifty-two thousand asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants who had been confined in Greece since mid-February 2016 continued to languish, feeling themselves forgotten. According to Human Rights Watch, the first deportations of Afghans, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis began to take place. Greek police assisted by auxiliaries from Frontex accompanied handcuffed migrants back to undisclosed locations in Turkey. Preliminary reports suggest that deportees not only were not given fair hearings but were deprived of their personal effects, including money, papers, and cell phones, and were given no advance notification of their situation.<sup>16</sup> Between 2016 and 2018 tens of thousands of educated Syrians who could be presumed to be grateful and loyal to the government and party of Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were granted Turkish citizenship, fueling anti-Syrian sentiments in many parts of Turkish society

By the time Syrian people arrived in large numbers on the southern shores of Europe, they had already endured much trauma and had made critical decisions that limited their ability to return to Syria or even to neighboring Arab countries. By investing their finite resources in a desperate venture to a European system that had become ever more fragile, hostile, and divided, they opened a wedge that many other migrants and survival refugees took advantage of. Though the number of Syrians reaching Europe is lower than the number in neighboring countries, Syrian migrants have a forward momentum and investment in the ideals of European asylum that threatens the integrity and solidarity of the European project. The stress on Europe is not of its being overwhelmed with Muslims of different culture and values but that the claims of European universalism are being tested.

## **Notes**

---

<sup>1</sup> Ben Taub, "The Assad Files," *New Yorker*, April 18, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/04/18/bashar-al-assads-war-crimes-exposed>.

<sup>2</sup> Sophia Hoffmann, “International Humanitarian Agencies and Iraqi Migration in Pre-conflict Syria,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, no. 2 (2016): 339–355.

<sup>3</sup> This is aside from the manipulation of the refugee flow by parties to the war that I’ve described elsewhere. See Leila Hudson, “Liquidating Syria, Fracking Europe,” *Middle East Policy* 22, no. 4 (2015): 22–39.

<sup>4</sup> “Lebanon and Jordan Close Their Borders to Syrian Refugees,” Fanack 2016, <https://fanack.com/refugees/lebanon-and-jordan-close-their-borders-to-syrian-refugees/>.

<sup>5</sup> Shannon Doocy, Emily Lyles, Tefera D. Delbiso, and Courtland W. Robinson, “Internal Displacement and the Syrian crisis: An Analysis of Trends from 2011–2014,” *Conflict and Health* 9, no. 1 (2015), doi: 10.1186/s13031-015-0060-7.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis Turner, “Explaining the (Non-)Encampment of Syrian Refugees: Security, Class and the Labour Market in Lebanon and Jordan,” *Mediterranean Politics* 20, no. 3 (2015): 386–404.

<sup>7</sup> Khaled K. Alafi, “Syrians and Business in Irbid City: Jordanian Stability and Refugees: A Qualitative Study,” *International Journal of Business and Management* 9, no. 6 (2014). See also Ali Fakh and May Ibrahim, “The Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Labor Market in Neighboring Countries: Empirical Evidence from Jordan,” *Defence and Peace Economics* 27, no. 1 (2015): 1–23.

<sup>8</sup> Christian Klassert, Katja Sigel, Erik Gawel, and Bernd Klauer, “Modeling Residential Water Consumption in Amman: The Role of Intermittency, Storage, and Pricing for Piped and Tanker Water,” *Water* 7, no. 7 (2015): 3643–3670.

<sup>9</sup> Cathrine Thorleifsson, “The Limits of Hospitality: Coping Strategies among Displaced Syrians in Lebanon,” *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 6 (2016): 1071–1082.

<sup>10</sup> Cengiz Bahçekapili and Buket Cetin, “The Impacts of Forced Migration on Regional Economies: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Turkey,” *International Business Research* 8, no. 9 (2015): 1–15.

<sup>11</sup> Eleni Karageorgiou, “Solidarity and Sharing in the Common European Asylum System: The Case of Syrian Refugees,” *European Politics and Society* 17, no. 2 (2016): 196–214.

<sup>12</sup> This account is based on interviews with Syrians who made the journey in 2014–2016.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Nevena Nancheva (2015), “The Common European Asylum System and the Failure to Protect: Bulgaria’s Syrian Refugee Crisis,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 15, no. 4 (2015): 439–455.

<sup>15</sup> Marco Odello, “Reforming the Common European Asylum System: Legislative Developments and Judicial Activism of the European Courts,” *International Journal of Refugee Law* 27, no. 3 (2015): 519–522, doi: 10.1093/ijrl/eev042.

<sup>16</sup> “EU/Greece: First Turkey Deportations Riddled with Abuse,” Human Rights Watch, April 19, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/19/eu/greece-first-turkey-deportations-riddled-abuse>.