

# **Conceptualising Syrian war migrations: displacements, migrants' rights and the major reception regimes**

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the migration of people from Syria after the outbreak of the civil war. The ambition of the paper is to develop and nuance the typology of migrations of Syrians and relate the categories of international migrants to their rights, as provided by various reception regimes. The proposed typologies may help us better to understand the complexity of the migrations and the inconsistencies in reception and humanitarian standards. We argue that migration trends, reception regimes and the positioning of the Syrian refugees and migrants are highly interconnected and dynamic factors, resulting in different regular and irregular flows and migrant statuses. Furthermore, it is maintained that the management of the Syrian humanitarian and refugee crisis has revealed – and probably more so than any other, comparable event – the variety of inconsistencies in migration and protection policies and the widespread lack of will for more equitable burden-sharing.

**Keywords:** Asylum seekers, Refugee policies, Refugees' rights, Reception Standards, Syria

## **1 Introduction**

The war in Syria, which is arguably the most complex contemporary large-scale armed conflict, has resulted in incomprehensible human tragedy, tremendous destruction, hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of refugees. This article focuses on the refugee and migrant outflows that this war has spawned. The highly changing dynamic of the war, adjustments in

the responses of the receiving countries and refugees' human agency have together resulted in a proliferation of different refugee flows and categories of migrants. A large number of studies have explored the refugee crisis, the responses of receiving countries and the hardships suffered by Syrian refugees.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on these studies, the present paper endeavours to develop a categorisation or typology of these migrations and migration regimes.

Aiming to explore the nexus of the migrant rights and migration regimes, we seek to provide a more comprehensive conceptualisation of Syrian mobility after the outbreak of the war – a conceptualisation that reaches beyond formal definitions of refugees and asylum seekers, such as those based on UN Refugee Convention and used by the UN's Refugee Agency/United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and asylum authorities in receiving countries. Our conceptualisation of Syrian refugee migrations builds on relevant academic publications, research reports and various statistics. Regarding sources of statistics, we rely on the UNHCR's statistics on asylum seekers and resettled refugees, the UN's foreign-born statistics and data on family, work and student permits from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

This paper is primarily a desk study, yet we combine the above-mentioned data with our own previous research. In the period 2010–2019, we conducted several interconnected studies on refugee migrations pertinent to the discussion in this article. These studies focused on these two topics: (i) migrations of Syrians to different receiving countries in the Middle East; (ii) responses to refugee migrations via the Western Balkans towards Western Europe.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See N. Aras, E. G. Mencutek and Z. Sahin, 'The International Migration and Foreign Policy Nexus: The Case of Syrian Refugee Crisis and Turkey', 12:3 *Migration Letters* (2015) pp. 193-208; see also M. Janmyr, 'ProClarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon', 35:4 *Refugee Survey Quarterly* (2016) pp. 58-78. See also L. Turner, 'Explaining the (non-) encampment of Syrian refugees: security, class and the labour market in Lebanon and Jordan', 20:3 *Mediterranean politics* (2015) pp. 386-404; P. Yazgan, D.E. Utku and I. Sirkeci, 'Syrian Crisis and Migration', 12:3 *Migration Letters* (2015) pp. 251-262; A. Kvittingen, M. Valenta, H. Tabbara, D. Baslan, B. Berg, 'The Conditions and Migratory Aspirations of Syrian and Iraqi Refugees in Jordan', 32:1 *Journal of Refugee Studies* (2019) pp. 106–124,

<sup>2</sup> Kvittingen, *supra* note 1; M. Valenta, J. Jakobsen, 'Nexus of armed conflicts and migrations to the Gulf: migrations to the GCC from war-torn source countries in Asia, Africa and the Arab neighbourhood', 54:1 *Middle Eastern Studies* (2018) pp. 22-47; M. Valenta, D. Zuparic-Iljic, T. Vidovic, 'The Reluctant Asylum-Seekers:

The data material in these studies includes interviews with refugees, migration experts and numerous employees in NGOs working with refugees in the Middle East and various countries in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

The article is divided into two interrelated parts. In the first part, we develop the typology of *internal* displacements in Syria. Here, we also canvass the dynamic of migrations and reception standards, discussing as well the accommodations provided to the displaced people. In the second part, we focus on (international) refugees. We identify the major receivers of Syrian refugees, clustering them into four major reception regimes. Here, we explore the major elements of the regimes, lending special attention to differences in reception standards and inconsistencies in the rights to enter, resettle and integrate into the receiving countries. We argue that the international community's response to the Syrian refugee crisis has been incoherent and characterised by a widespread lack of will for more equitable burden-sharing.

## **2 Categories and definitions of Syrian international migrants and refugees**

Bakewell reminds us that we need to be sensitive while developing the analytical categories within the field of refugee migration studies.<sup>4</sup> He argues that:

the search for policy relevance has encouraged researchers to take the categories, concepts and priorities of policy makers and practitioners as their initial frame of reference for identifying their areas of study and formulating research questions ... This has resulted in confusion between categories of policy and analysis, which is widely seen as a major weakness in the field of refugee

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Migrants at the Southeastern Frontiers of the European Migration System', 34:3 *Refugee Survey Quarterly* (2015) pp. 95–113.

<sup>3</sup> We have been in contact with migration experts and numerous employees in NGOs who have extensive knowledge on Syrian refugees, *inter alia*, in Turkey, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Germany, Sweden and Norway.

<sup>4</sup> See O. Bakewell, 'Research Beyond the Categories: The Importance of Policy Irrelevant Research into Forced Migration', 21:4 *Journal of Refugee Studies* (2008) pp. 432–453.

studies. In particular, it leaves large groups of forced migrants invisible in both research and policy ... academic researchers in refugee studies have adopted definitions of refugees based on those of concern to UNHCR, or falling within the UN convention definition or some other protocol or agreement ... This over-reliance on policy categories is a fundamental weakness in the field of refugee studies.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, the analytical point of departure is a conception of refugee as it is defined in Article 1(A)(2) of the 1951 Refugee Convention and amended by its 1967 Protocol. There, a refugee is defined as someone who:

owing to 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 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, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of refugee employed by the Refugee Convention excludes internally displaced people (IDPs) and other categories of forced migrants. However, in order to broaden and nuance the analysis of forced migrants produced by the Syrian war we include in our overview Syrian IDPs as well. Following the Refugee Convention, we still distinguish between refugees and IDPs, using the term ‘forced migrants’ when we refer to both (international) refugees and IDPs. Furthermore, we will fine-tune our analysis of Syrian forced migrants by distinguishing between asylum seekers, resettled refugees, undocumented forced migrants and various categories of IDPs. We also add to our analysis a category of Syrian ‘international migrants’

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<sup>5</sup> See Bakewell *supra* note 4, pp. 432, 433, 436.

<sup>6</sup> See online at <[emergency.unhcr.org/entry/55772/refugee-definition](https://www.emergency.unhcr.org/entry/55772/refugee-definition)>, last accessed 16 September 2019.

in which we include Syrians who are not registered as refugees or asylum seekers. These are people who reside abroad on labour-migrant, student or family-member visas, but who may arguably still be considered as forced migrants or mixed migrants.

### **3 Internally displaced persons in Syria: Dynamic of migrations and reception standards**

According to widespread estimates, the Syrian war has resulted in almost 13 million forced migrants, which amounts to over 60 per cent of Syria's pre-war population. Almost half of them – 6.2 million – are IDPs who are still living in Syria.<sup>7</sup> The unpredictability and the dynamic of the conflict has led to a highly unstable situation. Front lines in the conflict have fluctuated extensively, and whole regions, cities and territories have changed hands since the conflict started. This has triggered several waves of internal displacements, including, in some instances, the eventual return of IDPs to their original homes. As a result, IDPs are presently scattered across the country.<sup>8</sup>

Since the start of the war, around spring 2011, the number of internally displaced Syrians increased steadily until 2014. Thereafter, numbers gradually declined to 6.1 million in 2017. This trend may be explained by reference to the shifting dynamic of the conflict. The escalation of the war resulted in an extreme increase in numbers of IDPs, while the subsequent decrease was a function of a mix of out-migrations and the return of many IDPs. It should be stressed that these processes have often happened simultaneously. Therefore, in parallel with

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<sup>7</sup> See P. Connor, *Most displaced Syrians are in the Middle East, and about a million are in Europe* (Pew Research Center, Washington DC, 2018).

See also online at <[www.oecd.org/migration/UNHCR-OECD-safe-pathways-for-refugees.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/migration/UNHCR-OECD-safe-pathways-for-refugees.pdf)>, last accessed 24 May 2019; see also <[www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html](http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html)>, last accessed 24 May 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Directions of the movements unfolded as a response to developments in the conflict. People tend to find refuge in areas controlled by forces that share their ideological, political, ethnic and religious affiliations. For example, Kurdish IDPs often moved to areas dominated by Kurdish forces in North Syria. IDPs affiliated with the Assad regime generally fled either to Damascus or to coastal areas dominated by the Syrian government. A similar logic of migration applies to migrations to neighbouring countries.

new displacements, significant numbers of returns have been registered, especially in the most recent years. In 2016, for example, 550,000 IDPs returned, while 850,000 Syrians returned to their original homes in 2017.<sup>9</sup> Figure 1 exhibits the estimated numbers of internally displaced Syrians in the period 2012-2017.

FIGURE 1: HERE

The complexity and the dynamic of the conflict led to the proliferation of different patterns of internal migrations, hence producing various categories of IDPs. Here, we may distinguish among Syrian IDPs according to the temporality and the distance of displacement and according to the number of internal migrations they were forced to make. For example, some of the former IDPs we met described how they had to undergo several stages of displacement within Syria's borders. Typically, they first found refuge in neighbouring towns, effectively becoming guests in the homes of their friends and relatives. Later, when the conflict reached these areas as well, these people – and their hosts – had to move again.

We may as well create several other categories and classifications of IDPs based on the hardships they face. We can, for example, distinguish between Syrian IDPs who were in proximity of the front lines and those who were not. We can also differentiate between those who were in collective shelters and those who were sheltered in private accommodations and the like.<sup>10</sup> There is also a difference, as noted above, between those who fled to relatively safe areas and those who were displaced in areas and cities that were later besieged and attacked. A

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<sup>99</sup> See online at <[medium.com/@UNmigration/syria-seven-years-on-c76468e63b2b](https://medium.com/@UNmigration/syria-seven-years-on-c76468e63b2b)>, last accessed 24 May 2019.

<sup>10</sup> In 2017, more than 750,000 IDPs lived in last-resort sites, such as various kinds of refugee camps, tents, informal settlements and collective shelters. In that year, more than 330,000 Syrian IDPs lived in refugee camps and informal settlements in the northern part of the country; that is to say, in proximity of the Turkish border. See humanitarian needs overview: Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieved from reliefweb: <[reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2018\\_syr\\_hno\\_english.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2018_syr_hno_english.pdf)>, last accessed 24 May 2019. See also online at <[website.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/books/20180601\\_101\\_facts\\_and\\_figures\\_on\\_syrian\\_refugee\\_cr\\_isis.pdf](https://website.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/books/20180601_101_facts_and_figures_on_syrian_refugee_cr_isis.pdf)>, last accessed 24 May 2019.

substantial number of the latter refugees in fact experienced worse horrors in their temporary refuge than they did prior to their original displacement.<sup>11</sup>

The proposed categories are also closely related to each other. For example, some Syrians have moved away from the most unstable cities and regions of Syria – such as Hama, Idlib and Homs – to relatively calmer parts of the country, such as Latakia and Tartus on the Syrian coast. In contrast to these one-time displacements, large numbers of internally displaced Syrians migrated several times, usually responding to the opening of evacuation corridors from besieged areas, escalations in the fighting and changes in the front lines.<sup>12</sup>

In periods, the largest shares of IDPs were displaced within their own governorate, in the relative proximity of their homes. Many of these people returned to their homes, for shorter or longer periods, depending on the dynamic of the conflict and alterations to the front lines. In 2017, for instance, 2.9 million new displacements were recorded, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). However, these displacements often occurred within governorates and did not last long. After the worst battles ceased, people tended to return home; contrarily, when battle intensity escalated, they fled again.<sup>13</sup>

In very recent times, hundreds of thousands of new displacements have resulted from developments on the battlefield and changes to the strategies of the main combatants. Notably, advances and retreats of key parties in the conflict – *inter alia*, the advance of regime-controlled forces since late 2017 and the Turkish-led Operation Euphrates Shield (from August 2016) and Operation Olive Branch (from January 2018) – added to the number of IDPs. Around 300,000 people fled southern parts of Syria in this period. Furthermore, more than 150,000 left Afrin

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<sup>11</sup> One known example is provided by Palestinian refugees in the Yarmouk camp in Damascus; *see* online at <[www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/26/palestinian-refugee-camp-syria-turns-unimaginably-brutal-assad/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/26/palestinian-refugee-camp-syria-turns-unimaginably-brutal-assad/)>, last accessed 4 June 2019; for other cases *see* online at <[www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/08/syria-deadly-labyrinth-traps-civilians-trying-to-flee-raqqa/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/08/syria-deadly-labyrinth-traps-civilians-trying-to-flee-raqqa/)>, last accessed 4 June 2019.

<sup>12</sup> For example, IDPs who fled from Aleppo to Idlib later suffered clashes there as well; *see* online at <[www.middleeasteye.net/news/nowhere-go-thousands-displaced-aleppo-fear-same-fate-idlib](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/nowhere-go-thousands-displaced-aleppo-fear-same-fate-idlib)>, last accessed 24 June 2019.

<sup>13</sup> *See* online at <[medium.com/@UNmigration/syria-seven-years-on-c76468e63b2b](https://medium.com/@UNmigration/syria-seven-years-on-c76468e63b2b)>, last accessed 22 February 2019.

Region (in northwestern Syria) and around 90,000 fled Eastern Ghouta, a region abutting Damascus. A large proportion of these people were from before IDPs were accommodated in various collective shelters in rural Damascus.<sup>14</sup> However, the changing situation on the ground also resulted in a significant number of IDP returns. According to the UNHCR, in 2018, more than 700,000 IDPs returned to their towns and homes following the Syrian government's recapturing of the main and most populous parts of the country.<sup>15</sup>

#### **4 Syrian international migrants and refugees: reception regimes and policies**

For large numbers of Syrians, though, the internal displacements were just an initial stage in the migration process, and they eventually transmuted into *emigrations* from the country. These emigrations have led to a proliferation of different formal and informal categories of migrants. Figure 2 exhibits the estimated numbers of Syrian refugees in major host countries in the Middle East and North America.

FIGURE 2: HERE

According to the UNHCR, as per late 2017, there were 6.3 million Syrian (international) refugees, making Syria the largest refugee-producing country in the world.<sup>16</sup> As Figure 2 shows, the largest receivers of Syrian refugees are the neighbouring countries (with the

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<sup>14</sup> See online at <[reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unhcr-syria-factsheetq2-april-june-2018](http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unhcr-syria-factsheetq2-april-june-2018)>, last accessed 22 February 2019.

<sup>15</sup> See online at <[reporting.unhcr.org/node/2530?y=2019#year](http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2530?y=2019#year)>, last accessed 24 April 2019; <[reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Syria%20Fact%20Sheet%20October%202018.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Syria%20Fact%20Sheet%20October%202018.pdf)>, last accessed 24 February 2019.

<sup>16</sup> See online at <[www.oecd.org/migration/UNHCR-OECD-safe-pathways-for-refugees.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/migration/UNHCR-OECD-safe-pathways-for-refugees.pdf)>, last accessed 29 May 2019.



exception of Israel): Turkey (which by far hosts the biggest number), Lebanon and Jordan are the three largest hosts, and Iraq is the fifth largest (Germany is number four). As of 2019, there were 5.6 million Syrian refugees in these four states. Yet, there are significant numbers of Syrians in other countries as well, including in the Middle East, Europe and North America.<sup>17</sup>

Syrians in the receiving countries may be categorised in many ways; *inter alia*, a distinction can be made according to their migration trajectories, formal status and type of residence, social rights, socioeconomic position in the receiving society and their living conditions.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, we can distinguish between various categories of Syrian forced migrants; *inter alia*, asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, transit migrants, stranded migrants, irregular migrants and mixed migrants.<sup>19</sup> This list is far from complete. Furthermore, these categories are not static. Regarding the type of protection, we can separate between, on the one hand, Syrians who are granted permanent protection and generous social rights and, on the other hand, those whose access to basic services is scarce and whose residence in the receiving country is only temporary. We may also distinguish between Syrians who migrated legally to the host countries and those who had to enter the receiving countries as irregular migrants. One further distinction can be made between Syrians who are living in informal settlements and those who live in various private accommodations, refugee camps and reception centres for asylum seekers. The former is, for example, typically the case for Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan. Yet, sizable numbers in these states do live in refugee camps, such as Zataary and Azraq in Jordan and Ceylanpınar and Suruç in Turkey (and Domiz in Iraq).<sup>20</sup> In 2018, 7 per cent of Syrian refugees in Turkey lived in refugee camps, while the

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<sup>17</sup> See online at <[www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/29/where-displaced-syrians-have-resettled/ft\\_18-01-26\\_syriarefugees\\_map/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/29/where-displaced-syrians-have-resettled/ft_18-01-26_syriarefugees_map/)>, last accessed 29 May 2019.

<sup>18</sup> See Turner, *supra* note 1; Aras, Sahin and Mencutek, *supra* note 1; Janmyr, *supra* note 1; Kvittingen, *supra* note 1.

<sup>19</sup> See <[drc.ngo/media/4676369/dsp-resettlement2.pdf](http://drc.ngo/media/4676369/dsp-resettlement2.pdf)>, last accessed 29 May 2019.

<sup>20</sup> The largest of these refugee camps is Zaatari in Jordan. In 2017, 130,000 Syrian refugees lived in the three largest refugee centres: Zaatari, Azraq and Emirati Jordanian Camp.

corresponding number for Iraq was 37 per cent, and for Jordan 21 per cent.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Lebanon has been reluctant to establish refugee camps for Syrians at all.<sup>22</sup>

To systemise these experiences, we have clustered the above-mentioned categories into four major reception regimes: the European asylum-seeker regime, the North American regime, the labour-migration regimes of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and the refugee-reception regimes that are typical for Syria's neighbouring states. The core defining elements of each of these regimes are outlined in figure 3.

### FIGURE 3: HERE

As we can see from Figure 3, the regimes differ on many accounts: regarding the number of Syrians they have received; the distance of migration or proximity to Syria; the legality of migrations; and the temporariness or permanence of protection and residence they offer. Still, it is important to stress that this model and its constituent categories represent but a rough classification that should be interpreted with caution. Each of these reception regimes is discussed in more detail in the next four sections. First, we present the large reception regimes in proximity of Syria. Thereafter, we discuss the European regime, the labour-migration regimes in the GCC and the North American regime.

#### ***4.1 Syrians in neighbouring countries***

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<sup>21</sup> See online at <reliefweb.int/map/syrian-arab-republic/syria-conflict-without-borders-numbers-and-locations-refugees-and-idps-1>, last accessed 9 December 2019.

<sup>22</sup> See online at <carnegie-mec.org/2018/04/16/policy-framework-for-refugees-in-lebanon-and-jordan-pub-76058>; see <data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5>, last accessed 24 February 2019;

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<website.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/books/20180601\_101\_facts\_and\_figures\_on\_syrian\_refugee\_cr\_isis.pdf>, last accessed 24 February 2019; see also <data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36>, last accessed 24 February 2019.

As indicated in Figure 3, with respect to refugee-reception regimes, Syria's neighbours share several important features; some of these offer advantages to refugees, others are rather disadvantageous. On the one hand, refugees who were resettled in the proximity of Syria have been relatively well-positioned to take 'look-and-see' tours, to check what is left of their properties back home and to investigate repatriation possibilities. Another advantage is offered by the social and cultural context in contiguous states. The Syrian refugees whom we met in Jordan, for example, stressed that they shared the same religion, culture and language with the host population, which was seen as a clear advantage with respect to the possibilities for establishing good relations with locals.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, most studies and reports indicate that the neighbouring countries have, in fact, offered very few possibilities to Syrian refugees for integration into the local communities.<sup>24</sup> Syrians are here granted only *temporary* protection, which is combined with inadequate access to work. Furthermore, a large proportion of Syrian refugees in these countries are without any work permit or legal residence permit, thus being dependent on humanitarian aid and typically having to live in substandard accommodations in poverty.<sup>25</sup>

For example, less than 30,000 Syrian refugees obtained work permits in Turkey from 2016 to September 2018; the corresponding number for Syrians in Jordan was, in 2017, less

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<sup>23</sup> See Kvittingen, *supra* note 1; *see also*

<[website.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/books/20180601\\_101\\_facts\\_and\\_figures\\_on\\_syrian\\_refugee\\_crisis.pdf](http://website.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/books/20180601_101_facts_and_figures_on_syrian_refugee_crisis.pdf)>, last accessed 5 June 2019.

<sup>24</sup> See F. Fakhoury, 'Multi-level governance and migration politics in the Arab world: the case of Syria's displacement', 45:8 *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2019) pp. 1310-1326; U. Korkut, 'Pragmatism, moral responsibility or policy change: the Syrian refugee crisis and selective humanitarianism in the Turkish refugee regime', 4:2 *Comparative Migration Studies* (2016) pp. 1-20; A.J. Knudsen, 'The Great Escape? Converging Refugee Crises in Tyre, Lebanon', 37:1 *Refugee Survey Quarterly* (2018) pp. 96-115; Turner, *supra* note 1; Aras, Sahin and Mencutek, *supra* note 1; Janmyr, *supra* note 1; *See also* online at <[website.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/books/20180601\\_101\\_facts\\_and\\_figures\\_on\\_syrian\\_refugee\\_crisis.pdf](http://website.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/books/20180601_101_facts_and_figures_on_syrian_refugee_crisis.pdf)>, last accessed 24 February 2019.

<sup>25</sup> See Turner, *supra* note 1; Aras, Sahin and Mencutek, *supra* note 1; Janmyr, *supra* note 1; *See also* online at <[www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/access-labour-market-0](http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/access-labour-market-0)>, last accessed 5 June 2019; *see also* <[seefar.org/research/return-stay-migrate-understanding-aspirations-syrian-refugees-turkey/](http://seefar.org/research/return-stay-migrate-understanding-aspirations-syrian-refugees-turkey/)>, last accessed 5 June 2019.

than 50,000.<sup>26</sup> Such relatively meagre numbers notwithstanding, the largest numbers of Syrians with irregular status are found in Lebanon. In 2017, more than 70 per cent of Syrians aged 15 or above in Lebanon lacked a resident permit, and a mere 0.5 per cent had work permits.<sup>27</sup> It is estimated that more than 20 per cent of Syrian men in Jordan are unemployed, while the unemployment rate for Syrian men in Lebanon is about 13 (2017 estimates). Furthermore, 80 per cent of Syrians live below the Lebanese poverty line of USD 3.84 per person per day,<sup>28</sup> while extreme poverty rates of Syrian refugees in Jordan were between 50 and 60 per cent, and in Lebanon between 40 and 50 per cent.<sup>29</sup>

Such refugee systems may be called ‘high numbers/poor conditions’ regimes. Syria’s immediate neighbours – that is to say, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq (Israel has not officially accepted any refugees at all<sup>30</sup>) – have in periods had open-border policies for Syrians, which facilitated large-scale inflows of refugees. Figure 4 shows the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq in the period 2011-2017.

#### FIGURE 4: HERE

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<sup>26</sup> See K. Lenner and L. Turner, ‘Making Refugees Work? The Politics of Integrating Syrian Refugees into the Labor Market in Jordan’, 28:1 *Middle East Critique* (2019) pp. 65-95; See also <[reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/JIF-ProtectionBrief-2017-Final.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/JIF-ProtectionBrief-2017-Final.pdf)>, last accessed 25 April 2019; see also

<[www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/access-labour-market-0](http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/access-labour-market-0)>, last accessed 25 April 2019.

<sup>27</sup> See

<[www.careinternational.org/files/files/CAREInternationalLebanon\\_RefugeesinLebanon\\_Whatworksandwhythat mattersforthe future.pdf](http://www.careinternational.org/files/files/CAREInternationalLebanon_RefugeesinLebanon_Whatworksandwhythat mattersforthe future.pdf)>, last accessed 25 April 2019;

see also <[reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/VASyR%202017.compressed.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/VASyR%202017.compressed.pdf)>, last accessed 25 April 2019.

<sup>28</sup> See online at <[reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/VASyR%202017.compressed.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/VASyR%202017.compressed.pdf)>, last accessed 25 April 2019. See also <[www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2017/12/5a3cf2a04/syrian-refugees-lebanon-destitute-study-finds.html](http://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2017/12/5a3cf2a04/syrian-refugees-lebanon-destitute-study-finds.html)>, last accessed 25 April 2019.

<sup>29</sup> See World Bank, *The Mobility of Displaced Syrians: An Economic and Social Analysis* (WB Research reports, Washington DC, 2019)

<sup>30</sup> See <[www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-israel/israel-will-not-accept-any-syrian-refugees-on-its-territory-defense-minister-idUSKBN1JP10E](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-israel/israel-will-not-accept-any-syrian-refugees-on-its-territory-defense-minister-idUSKBN1JP10E)>, last accessed 26 March 2019.

As we have already noted, the number of IDPs in Syria increased between 2011 and 2014. Thereafter, numbers gradually declined, which, to a large degree, was a function of out-migrations, primarily to Turkey. Turkey sustained an open-border policy to Syrians for a longer period than the other countries in the region, which resulted in a large-scale influx of Syrian refugees. As Figure 4 shows, Turkey experienced the largest increase in numbers of Syrian refugees in the period 2011-2017, while Syrian refugee migrant stocks remained stable in the other neighbouring states.

What is generally the case for refugees is that any prolongation of conflicts in their home country makes them increasingly focus on the long-term possibilities of integration into their new country. If the country in question does not provide such opportunities, refugees will then seek them in other countries.<sup>31</sup> As a result, Syria's neighbouring states have largely functioned as both transit and receiving countries for Syrians. For some categories of Syrian migrants, they have been just a stage in multiple 'fragmented migrations' as these Syrians first stayed for years in these states before deciding to continue their migrations to third countries. For example, the opening of the migrant corridor via Turkey and the Western Balkans to Western Europe was seen as the window of opportunity that triggered such secondary movements.<sup>32</sup>

#### ***4.2 The asylum-seeker regime in Europe***

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<sup>31</sup> See M. Collyer, 'Stranded Migrants and the Fragmented Journey', 23:3 *Journal of Refugee Studies* (2010) pp. 273-293; M. Collyer and H. De Haas, 'Developing Dynamic Categorisation of Transit Migration' 18:4 *Population, Space and Place* (2010) pp. 468-481; See also <[www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/oct/25/six-reasons-why-syrians-are-fleeing-to-europe-in-increasing-numbers](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/oct/25/six-reasons-why-syrians-are-fleeing-to-europe-in-increasing-numbers)>, last accessed 5 June 2019.

<sup>32</sup> F. Düvell, 'The "Great Migration" of summer 2015: analysing the assemblage of key drivers in Turkey', 45:12 *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2019) pp. 2227-2240; Knudsen *supra* note 24; Kvittingen, *supra* note 1.

A second regime for the reception of Syrian refugees is represented by receiving countries in the European Union and the European asylum-seeker policies. In fact, only very few countries in the EU have received large numbers of Syrian asylum seekers. In total, European states have taken in about 1 million Syrians since the war started in 2011. Four of these states – Germany, Sweden, Austria and the Netherlands – account for almost 80 per cent of this number. It is often argued that the Syrian migrations from neighbouring countries towards Western Europe were, to a large extent, triggered by their experiences with hardships associated with a protracted refugee situation combined with scarce possibilities for permanent protection and integration in local communities in neighbouring countries.<sup>33</sup> However, most Syrians have been denied legal pathways to asylum in Europe. Indeed, the common feature of the receiving countries in Europe is that the clear majority of Syrian refugees arrived as irregular migrants before they got an opportunity to apply for asylum. Therefore, Syrians who were eventually granted protection in Europe were those who managed to pass all obstacles and tools of deterrence created to stop or demotivate would-be asylum seekers.<sup>34</sup>

Figure 5 shows the inflows of Syrian asylum seekers in the four largest receiving countries in Europe between 2011-2017.

FIGURE 5: HERE

At this point, it is important to stress that the migrations of Syrians have happened under a variety of circumstances. Here, we may distinguish between the influx that took place before,

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<sup>33</sup> Several studies of Syrian refugees focus on the refugees' situation in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, and on how these countries have coped with the increasing numbers of refugees. It is evident that neighbouring countries have received a disproportionately large share of refugees from Syria, but that the refugees in these states are defined either as guests or as refugees on temporary visas; as such, they are denied various rights, which reduces their opportunity to integrate into the local communities.

<sup>34</sup> Such obstacles include border controls, fences, detentions, pushbacks, return to third 'safe countries' and registration in the EURODAC system. For more on these deterrence mechanisms, see A. Triandafyllidou, A. Dimitriadi, 'Deterrence and Protection in the EU's Migration Policy', 49:4 *The International Spectator* (2014) pp. 146-162; D. Skleparis, 'European governments' responses to the "refugee crisis": the interdependence of EU internal and external controls', 41:3 *Southeastern Europe* (2017) pp. 276-301.

during and after 2015 and 2016. These two years marked, respectively, the establishment and the closure of the Western Balkan corridor. Prior to the rise of this corridor, as well as after its closure, the costs of migration to Europe were considerably higher than they were during its existence, as various restrictive measures of deterrence were firmly in place. The deterrence measures rapidly decreased the number of Syrian asylum seekers in Western Europe.

The largest numbers of Syrians thus arrived in Europe from summer 2015 to spring 2016 (see Figure 5) via the Western Balkan corridor, at a time when several states in the region – both members and non-members of the EU – proclaimed themselves as transit countries. These migrations were in the grey zone between semi-legal and *de facto* legal migrations. While the corridor was open, some of these countries in periods stopped applying the tools of deterrence that are often used to curb illegal migration. Instead, they tolerated or even openly assisted the transit of would-be asylum seekers to Western Europe.<sup>35</sup>

The majority of Syrians who were granted protection in Western and Northern Europe got housing assistance and the right to work, and they were endowed with various social rights. Yet, at this point, we may also observe certain differences in the protection statuses provided to this group. The most relevant such difference is probably the one between refugee status and subsidiary protection status. The former gives far larger rights than does the latter, such as pathways to permanent residence and family reunion. For example, in the largest receiving country, Germany, subsidiary status provided only temporary residence to Syrians, which had to be renewed annually, and which posed clear restrictions on the right to family reunion.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For example, Serbia and Macedonia issued transit visas to the would-be asylum seekers, while Croatia and Slovenia provided organised transportations to people who were on their way towards destination countries in the core of the EU, see T. Tudoroiu, 'Transit Migration and "Valve States". The Triggering Factors of the 2015 Migratory Wave', 41:3 *Southeastern Europe* (2017) pp. 302-332; see also A. Greider, *Outsourcing Migration Management: The Role of the Western Balkans in the European Refugee Crisis* (Migration Policy Institute, Washington, DC, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> See <[www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/614200/IPOL\\_STU\(2018\)614200\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/614200/IPOL_STU(2018)614200_EN.pdf)>, last accessed 25 June 2019.

The increase in the numbers of Syrian asylum seekers in Western and Northern Europe in 2015 resulted in the more frequent use of subsidiary protection status. For example, in Germany in 2015, 96 per cent of Syrian refugees were granted permanent refugee status, while in 2016 and 2017, German authorities granted subsidiary protection to 42 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively, of Syrian asylum seekers.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to Syrians who obtained protection in Europe via the above-mentioned irregular and semi-legal pathways, a smaller group of Syrians arrived in Europe via legal resettlement channels such as family reunion permits, student permits and work permits and the UNHCR's resettlement programme for refugees.<sup>38</sup> However, these legal pathways for protection in Europe have been very circumscribed and are much smaller than the dominant asylum-seeker pathway. Figure 6 shows various categories of Syrians in the four largest receivers of Syrians in the EU. It clearly illustrates the imbalance between the above-described regular and irregular migration pathways.

FIGURE 6 HERE

The four largest receivers of Syrian refugees – Germany, Sweden, Austria and the Netherlands – received about 800,000 Syrians between 2011 and 2018; yet, less than 3 per cent of them arrived via the UNHCR's resettlement programme.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, in the period 2011-2017,

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<sup>37</sup> In parallel with an increase in numbers of asylum seekers during the migrant crisis, these countries increased their use of subsidiary protection. For an overview of practices in EU member states, see <[www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/shadow-reports/aida\\_refugee\\_rights\\_subsiding.pdf](http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/shadow-reports/aida_refugee_rights_subsiding.pdf)>, last accessed 24 February 2019; see also <[www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/asylum-procedure/treatment-specific-nationalities](http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/asylum-procedure/treatment-specific-nationalities)>, last accessed 25 June 2019. For the practice in Sweden, see S. Fratzke, *Weathering Crisis, Forging Ahead: Swedish Asylum and Integration Policy* (Migration Policy Institute, Washington, DC, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> The EU has addressed the problem of irregular migrations in several ways; inter alia, by creating an EU resettlement plan. However, most of these plans have not been fulfilled; see <[www.dw.com/en/how-the-eus-resettlement-plan-is-failing-to-meet-its-goal/a-46473093](http://www.dw.com/en/how-the-eus-resettlement-plan-is-failing-to-meet-its-goal/a-46473093)>, last accessed 16 August 2019.

<sup>39</sup> For more on these statistics, see online at <[www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/573dc82d4/resettlement-other-admission-pathways-syrian-refugees.html](http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/573dc82d4/resettlement-other-admission-pathways-syrian-refugees.html)>, last accessed 5 June 2019.



various OECD countries granted 255,900 permits to Syrians for work, study and family purposes. Almost 90 per cent of these permits were issued to family members of asylum seekers who were granted asylum in Europe. The largest receivers of these family members were the two largest receivers of Syrian asylum seekers – Germany and Sweden (see Figure 6) – which admitted, respectively, 106,000 and 49,000 Syrians through family reunions.<sup>40</sup> However, these legal pathways of family migrations would not have existed without the earlier waves of irregular asylum-seeker migrations. That is to say, family members first had to enter a European country via illegal migration channels; thereafter, they applied for asylum and family reunion.

### ***4.3 ‘Refugee regime by proxy’ in the Gulf region***

Bakewell reminds us that we have to be conscious and perceptive when we construct the analytical categories within the field of refugee migration studies; among other things, we have to distinguish between categories of policy and analysis.<sup>41</sup> It is against this background that we have chosen to add the receivers in the Gulf region to our overview. The six countries making up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman, are all significant receivers of migrants from countries in armed conflict – specifically, people who migrate outside the humanitarian and refugee regimes. Several scholars have attempted to assess the scale of the influx and the stance of the GCC

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<sup>40</sup> Numbers of family reunions of these countries were influenced by the restrictions imposed on Syrians who received subsidiary protection. See Fratzke, *supra* note 38; see also online at <[www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/asylum-procedure/treatment-specific-nationalities](http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/asylum-procedure/treatment-specific-nationalities)>, last accessed 25 August 2019. See also <[www.oecd.org/migration/UNHCR-OECD-safe-pathways-for-refugees.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/migration/UNHCR-OECD-safe-pathways-for-refugees.pdf)>, last accessed 5 June 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Bakewell, *supra* note 4.

authorities towards Syrians in the Gulf states.<sup>42</sup> They indicate that, even though authorities of the GCC states do not offer refugee status to people in need of protection, they occasionally use temporary labour migration policies as an ‘asylum policy by proxy’ or ‘quasi-asylum policy’.<sup>43</sup> For example, a report by De Bel Air notes, on the one hand, that, since 2011, GCC authorities have refrained from encouraging the entry of labour migrants from Syria, and that it has become increasingly challenging for Syrians to obtain the required sponsor (*Kafel*) in the GCC. Yet, she also states that this group of states seemingly represents a convenient alternative to refugee status in other countries – though this was first and foremost the case for Syrians who arrived in the GCC *before* the war began.<sup>44</sup>

The GCC countries, in fact, do not accept refugees and asylum seekers at all, and they offer neither temporary nor permanent residence within a refugee regime. The sponsorship-based temporary labour-migrant visa is the only pathway to residence. These countries have still been a major destination for temporary labour migrants from Syria. This was true also before the Syrian war commenced; indeed, in Saudi Arabia alone, there were more than 500,000 Syrians in 2010 (with a further 70,000 spread across the other GCC states), according to UN estimates. Sizable numbers of Syrians migrated to the GCC also during the conflict. UN estimates of the ‘foreign-born migrant stock’ show that in the period 2011-2017, the Syrian migrant stock in Saudi Arabia increased by almost 250,000. A similar number applies for the UAE, while 120,000 Syrians arrived in Kuwait in this period.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See F. De Bel-Air, *A Note on Syrian Refugees in the Gulf: Attempting to Assess Data and Policies* (European University Institute, Florence, 2015); see also Valenta and Jakobsen, *supra* note 2.

<sup>43</sup> H. Thiollet, ‘Migration as Diplomacy: Labour Migrants, Refugees, and Arab Regional Politics in the Oil-Rich Countries’, 79:1 *International Labor and Working-Class History* (2011) pp. 103-121.

<sup>44</sup> See De Bel Air, *supra* note 43; see also online at <[www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34132308](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34132308)>, last accessed 24 February 2019.

<sup>45</sup> It is difficult to assess realities and scale of migrations of Syrians to the GCC, due to the lack of accurate data. Therefore, we rely primarily on UN estimates and local sources.

See <[www.apnews.com/9cfb46113644483798391911c841a2a7](http://www.apnews.com/9cfb46113644483798391911c841a2a7)>, last accessed 25 February 2019; see <[www.thenational.ae/uae/government/2-8-million-syrians-moved-to-gcc-since-start-of-civil-war-1.82927](http://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/2-8-million-syrians-moved-to-gcc-since-start-of-civil-war-1.82927)>, last accessed 25 February 2019; see also <[gulfnews.com/world/mena/kuwait-extends-residency-permits-for-syrians-1.1577117](http://gulfnews.com/world/mena/kuwait-extends-residency-permits-for-syrians-1.1577117)>, last accessed 5 June 2019.

Syrians in the GCC are not defined as refugees, but rather as temporary labour migrants; hence these people are not included in the UNHCR's refugee statistics. Nevertheless, Syrians in the GCC, both those who arrived prior to and during the war, have, since the outbreak of the war, had other reasons than only pure economic ones to prolong their temporary residence. These can therefore be considered 'mixed migrants'. GCC officials, for their part, tend to call these Syrians 'their Arab brothers and sisters in distress', while claiming that they proceeded to relax visa regulations for this group after the armed conflict began. Residence permits were ostensibly also extended for those Syrians who were already in a GCC country.<sup>46</sup> Syrians were also allowed to convert their visitor visas into work visas, and they were also included in various amnesties that helped legalise their status.<sup>47</sup> In sum, therefore, the temporary labour migration regime in the GCC, in conjunction with the policies mentioned above, gave Syrians the chance to prolong their residence in the GCC; in practice, these mechanisms have, for many Syrians, served as a useful alternative to refugee status in other countries.<sup>48</sup>

#### ***4.4 The North American reception regime and the refugee resettlement programmes***

The fourth reception regime experienced by Syrian refugees is associated with refugee resettlement programmes. Resettlement programmes have been offered to various categories of Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries, although these programmes encompass only a small fraction of total Syrian refugee migrations.<sup>49</sup> They usually provide permanent

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<sup>46</sup> See online at <http://europe.newsweek.com/gulf-states-are-taking-syrian-refugees-401131?rm=eu>, last accessed 25 February 2019.

<sup>47</sup> See online at [www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/dubai/1-year-uae-visa-a-miracle-/for-us-syrian-refugees](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/dubai/1-year-uae-visa-a-miracle-/for-us-syrian-refugees), last accessed 25 April 2019.

<sup>48</sup> See online at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/webtv/reports/2015/09/08/Half-a-million-Syrians-entered-Saudi-since-the-start-of-the-war.html>, last accessed 25 April 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Discrepancies between resettlement needs and the capacity of the programme are huge. See online at [www.unhcr.org/5b28c7c04](http://www.unhcr.org/5b28c7c04), last accessed 25 April 2019; see also [www.refworld.org/docid/59786cf14.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/59786cf14.html); see [www.unhcr.org/resettlement-data.html](http://www.unhcr.org/resettlement-data.html), last accessed 24 February 2019;

admission, offering pathways to permanent residence and citizenship to selected individuals from countries where they currently live as refugees.<sup>50</sup> While the clear majority of Syrians arrived in Europe via informal or illegal channels and thereafter applied for asylum, Syrian refugee migrations to Canada and the United States were dominated by legal migrations through humanitarian resettlement programmes, such as that organised by the UNHCR.

From 2011 to 2018, Canada and the USA have received almost 50,000 Syrian refugees via the UNHCR's resettlement programme;<sup>51</sup> the bulk of these people were awarded permanent protection status.<sup>52</sup> The United States and Canada have traditionally been the largest receivers of refugees via the above-mentioned programmes. The US used to have the largest refugee resettlement programmes, resettling more refugees than all other countries put together.<sup>53</sup> However, this has changed in recent years.<sup>54</sup> As a result, Canada has emerged as the largest receiver of Syrian resettled refugees. Figure 7 shows developments in the departures of Syrian refugees to Canada and the United States via the UNHCR's resettlement programme in the period 2011-2018.

FIGURE 7 HERE

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*see also* <[www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/www.unhcr.org\\_52b2febafc5.pdf](http://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/www.unhcr.org_52b2febafc5.pdf)>, last accessed 29 March 2019.

<sup>50</sup> However, some countries, such as Germany, offered humanitarian admission of Syrian refugees through temporary resettlement programmes. *See* online at <[www.refworld.org/pdfid/53ecacd64.pdf](http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/53ecacd64.pdf)>, last accessed 24 February 2019; *see also* <[www.resettlement.eu/page/resettlement-relocation-or-humanitarian-admission-we-explain-terminology](http://www.resettlement.eu/page/resettlement-relocation-or-humanitarian-admission-we-explain-terminology)>, last accessed 24 February 2019.

<sup>51</sup> In Canada, most of the resettled refugees arrived under one of three programmes: government-assisted refugees, privately sponsored refugees and blended visa office-referred refugees. For more, *see* <[www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl\\_oag\\_201711\\_03\\_e\\_42668.html](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201711_03_e_42668.html)>, last accessed 24 February 2019.

<sup>52</sup> In the United States, some 8000 Syrians had temporary protection status in 2018. *See* online at <[www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/08/more-than-100000-haitian-and-central-american-immigrants-face-decision-on-their-status-in-the-u-s/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/08/more-than-100000-haitian-and-central-american-immigrants-face-decision-on-their-status-in-the-u-s/)>, last accessed 24 February 2019.

<sup>53</sup> *See* online at <[www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/05/for-the-first-time-u-s-resettles-fewer-refugees-than-the-rest-of-the-world/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/05/for-the-first-time-u-s-resettles-fewer-refugees-than-the-rest-of-the-world/)>, last accessed 3 June 2019.

<sup>54</sup> *See* online at <[www.migrationpolicy.org/article/syrian-refugees-united-states](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/syrian-refugees-united-states)>, last accessed 25 February 2019; *see* <[edition.cnn.com/2018/04/18/politics/us-syria-refugees/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/18/politics/us-syria-refugees/index.html)>, last accessed 25 February 2019.

Several other countries around the world have also received smaller numbers of Syrian refugees through various government programmes or private resettlement sponsorships.<sup>55</sup> The third largest receiver of Syrian refugees through the UNHCR’s resettlement programme is Germany, which also has several government- or state-managed resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes for Syrians currently living in third countries.<sup>56</sup> The selection criteria used – and the rights granted to the admitted Syrian refugees – by German programmes differ considerably depending on whether they are managed by the German government or the states/*Länder*.<sup>57</sup>

In total, 120,000 Syrians migrated via the UNHCR’s refugee resettlement programmes in the period 2011-2018. Figure 8 shows the twelve largest receivers of Syrians who have been resettled via this programme; together, they account for almost 90 per cent of the total. The number of resettlements reached its peak in 2016, with figures almost reaching 50,000. In the years that followed, however, numbers of resettlements have drastically declined. In 2018, only 23,000 Syrians were resettled via the UNHCR’s resettlement programme.

FIGURE 8: HERE

To summarise: the above-mentioned resettlement regimes, as well as the refugee regimes in Syria’s neighbouring countries and the asylum regimes in Europe, display several differences. Furthermore, there are also variations *within* the regimes, as well as between countries, regarding the scale of the refugee influx and how they deal with Syrian refugees. Yet, these regimes do have one important common feature: they all recognise Syrians as *refugees* in need of shelter and protection; hence they award Syrians with permanent or temporary residence.

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<sup>55</sup> For an overview of the private sponsorships, see: <[www.icmc.net/sites/default/files/documents/scoping-paper-icmc-europe-2017.pdf](http://www.icmc.net/sites/default/files/documents/scoping-paper-icmc-europe-2017.pdf)>, last accessed 25 April 2019.

<sup>56</sup> See C. Tometten, ‘Resettlement, Humanitarian Admission, and Family Reunion: The Intricacies of Germany’s Legal Entry Regimes for Syrian Refugees’, 37:2 *Refugee Survey Quarterly* (2018) pp.187–203.

For an overview, see <[www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/5162b3bc9/unhcr-resettlement-handbook-country-chapter-germany.html](http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/5162b3bc9/unhcr-resettlement-handbook-country-chapter-germany.html)>, last accessed 24 February 2019.

<sup>57</sup> See online at <[resettlement.de/en/humanitarian-admission-programmes/](http://resettlement.de/en/humanitarian-admission-programmes/)>, last accessed 25 April 2019.

The major exception in this regard is the regime in the GCC countries, which does not offer refugee status to people in need of protection. However, many Syrians either did not have the opportunity or resources to reach the preferred destination countries via refugee resettlement pathways, or they did not want to expose themselves to the dangers associated with illegal migrations routes to Europe. Therefore, for many Syrians, life as labour migrants, or other non-refugee statuses, is seen as a better option than other available alternatives.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, it is certainly clear that the above-outlined reception regimes, both refugee and non-refugee based ones, have in total displayed a large disharmony in the management of the Syrian humanitarian and refugee crisis. Indeed, the humanitarian endeavours and the international cooperation in the management of Syrian refugee flows and the reception of the refugees have been undermined by the particularism of various national states. As we have seen, the reception regimes have been characterised by a lack of capacity, a variety of inconsistencies in their migration and protection policies and the prevalent disinterest in more equitable burden-sharing. As a result, apart from Syria's neighbouring countries, few countries outside the region have offered stable, legal pathways to protection for large numbers of Syrian refugees.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper has focused on the various stages of the migration of people who left Syria after the outbreak of the civil war. We have combined a review of policies and the available, relevant statistics to explore the nexus of migrations, migrant statuses and migration regimes. With regard to the conceptualisation of Syrian migrations, we have nuanced the typology of *internal* displacements and *international* migrations of Syrians, and we have identified the major

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<sup>58</sup> For many, the alternative is temporary refugee status in neighbouring countries, with limited access to work – mostly irregular employment with considerably lower income – and with a consequent dependence on humanitarian aid.

reception regimes. Internal displacements of Syrians comprise multiple categories of migrants whose experiences differ regarding the type of accommodation and the number, length and distance of displacements. In addition to the type of accommodation, the standard of reception they experience depends largely on how safe and stable the area of displacements is. There is a clear difference in the realities faced by internally displaced Syrians who fled to relatively safe parts of the country and those who found shelter in areas that were later besieged and attacked.

International Syrian migrants can be divided into several general groups. We may, *inter alia*, distinguish between Syrians who have fled to other countries in the Middle East and those who migrated outside the region. It is certainly clear that Syria's neighbouring countries have received the vast majority of Syrians, while countries outside the region have agreed to accept only a relatively small fraction of Syrian refugees. Indeed, the latter group of states have instead tended to invest large resources to *curb* the influx, using a variety of deterring measures.

Within the above-mentioned general categories of international migrants, we may identify various sub-categories of Syrians. Among other possible differentiations, we may distinguish between Syrian asylum seekers, refugees, irregular migrants, labour migrants, family reunions, students, mixed migrants and migrants with temporary and permanent refugee status. It is maintained that the statuses of Syrians result from the reception regimes that these refugees have encountered in different receiving countries. We have identified several reception regimes that have received large numbers of Syrians. Some of them may be described as asylum and refugee regimes, while others are 'asylum regimes by proxy'. Furthermore, some may be described as 'large numbers/poor rights' regimes, while others appear as 'low numbers/extensive rights' regimes.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The distinction between 'high numbers/poor conditions' and 'low numbers/extensive rights' is, however, not clear-cut. For example, it does not coincide entirely with the geographical distinctions between European regimes and regimes in neighbouring countries, as we have discussed earlier. Syrian refugees in several European

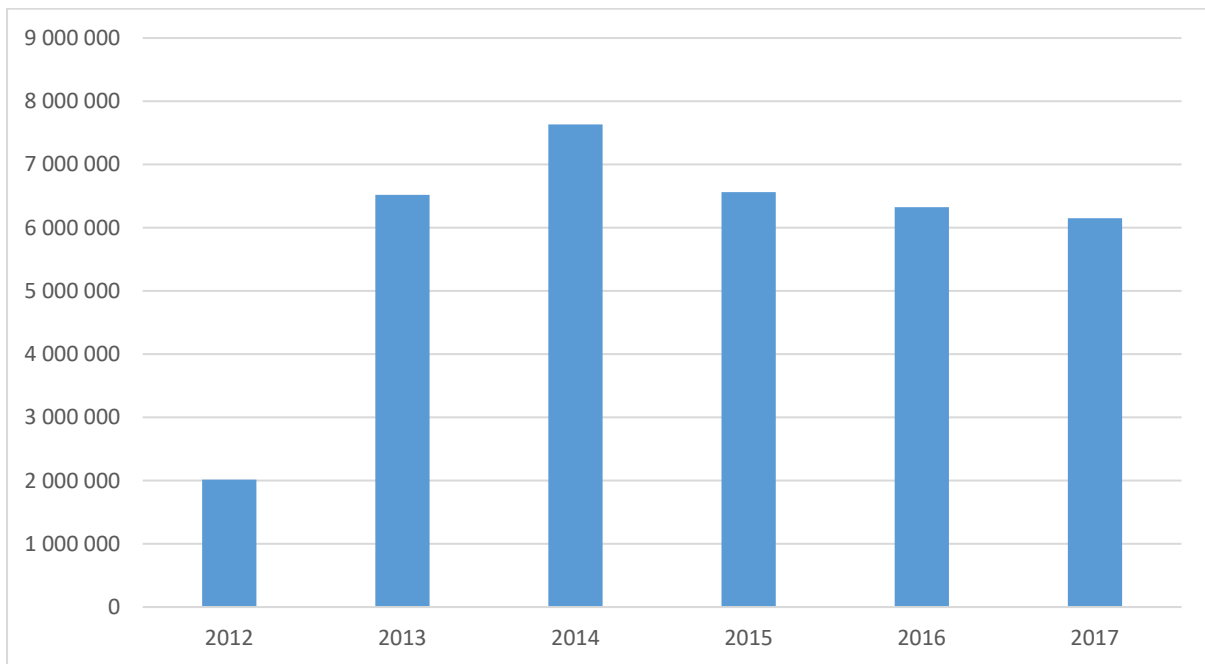
Differences in reception standards and social rights, and a lack of coherence in the management of the Syrian refugee crisis, are visible in several other ways. *Inter alia*, some of the regimes have allowed regular immigration of large numbers of Syrians – at least in certain periods – while others have blankly denied Syrians any legal access. Moreover, some regimes allow legal immigration but still deny Syrians refugee status. Finally, some deny legal access but award Syrians who manage to enter the country with permanent protection, legal pathways for family immigration and rather generous integration assistance. Indeed, this overview of Syrian migrations and the major reception regimes has confirmed the old argument that the international community is not capable of responding to a large refugee crisis – akin to the Syrian one – in any coherent and efficient fashion. The management of the Syrian crisis has revealed, probably more than any other comparable event, that the national responses prevail. In sum, the management of the Syrian refugee crisis has revealed a variety of inconsistencies in migration and protection policies, a widespread lack of will for more equitable burden-sharing and an insufficient capacity exhibited by the refugee resettlement programmes.

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countries, such as Greece, are relatively high in number and low on rights. In Turkey, the temporary protection system gives at least nominal rights, if not in practice.

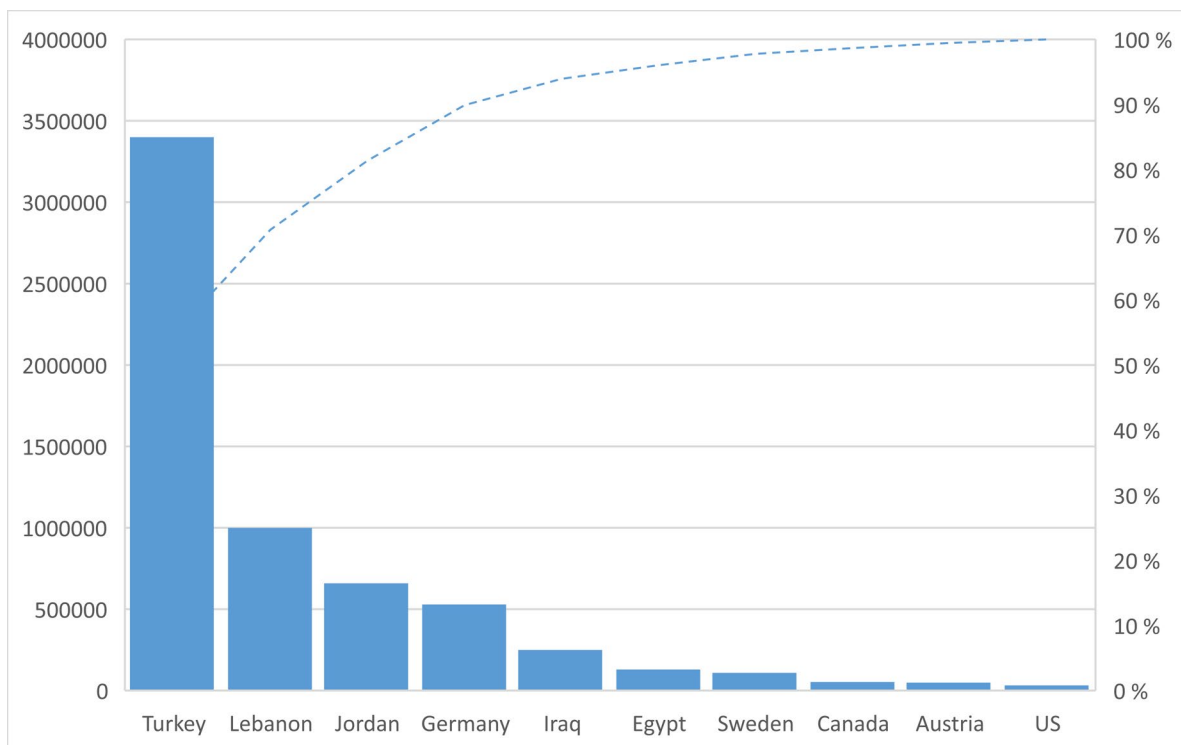


**Figure 1. Syrian IDPs, 2012-2017**



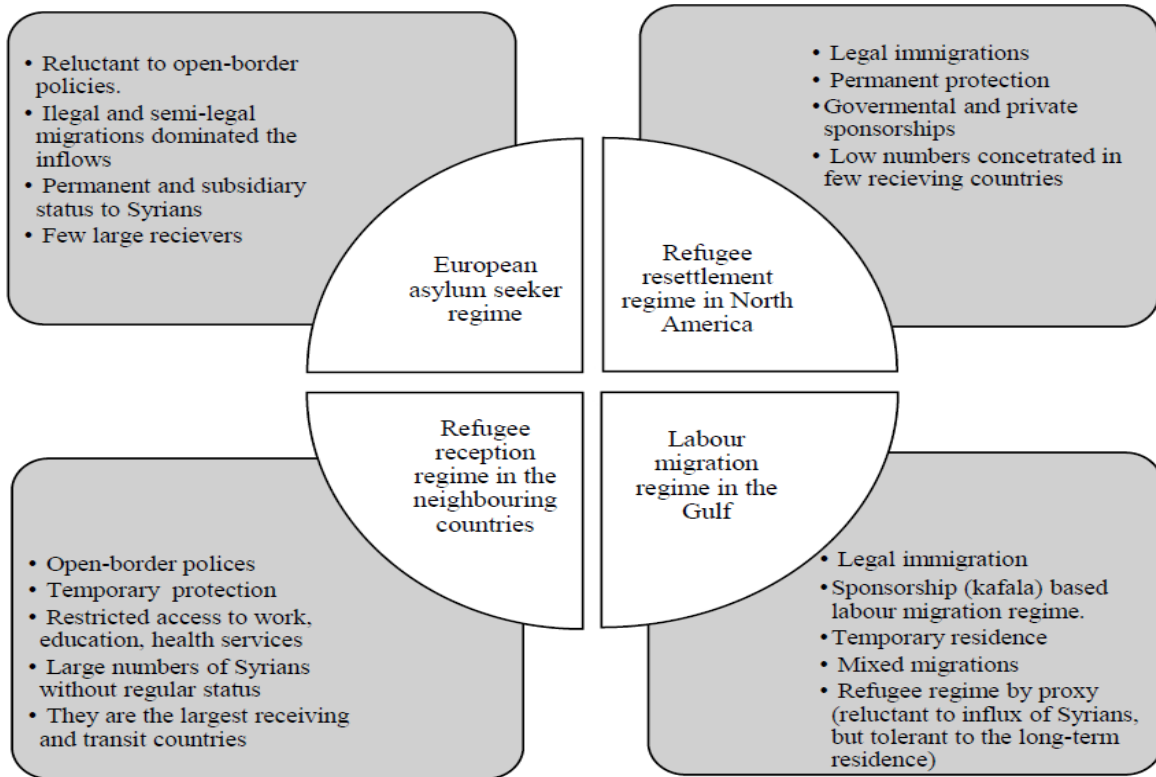
Source: own compilation, based on UNHCR's statistics

**Figure 2. Syrian refugees in the ten largest host countries in 2017**

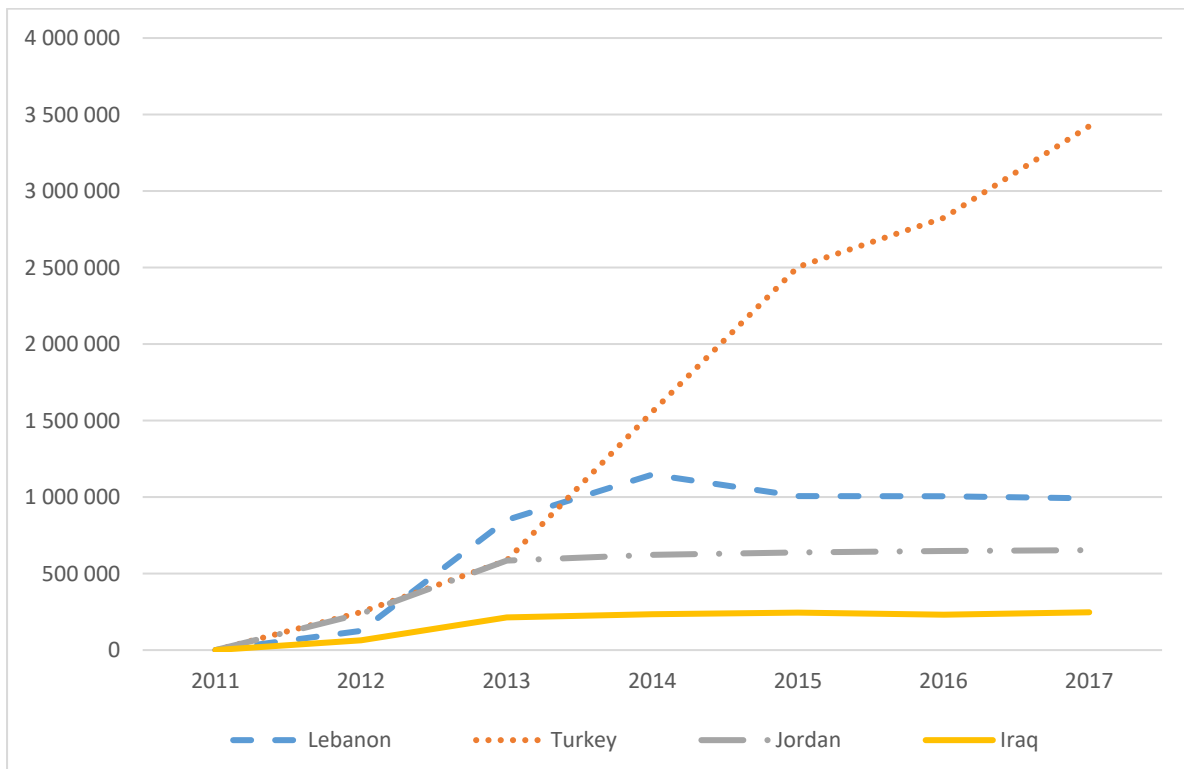


Source: own compilation, Pareto chart based on PEW's and UNHCR's statistics. Cumulative line on a secondary axis shows a percentage of the total.

**Figure 3. The reception regimes and their core elements**

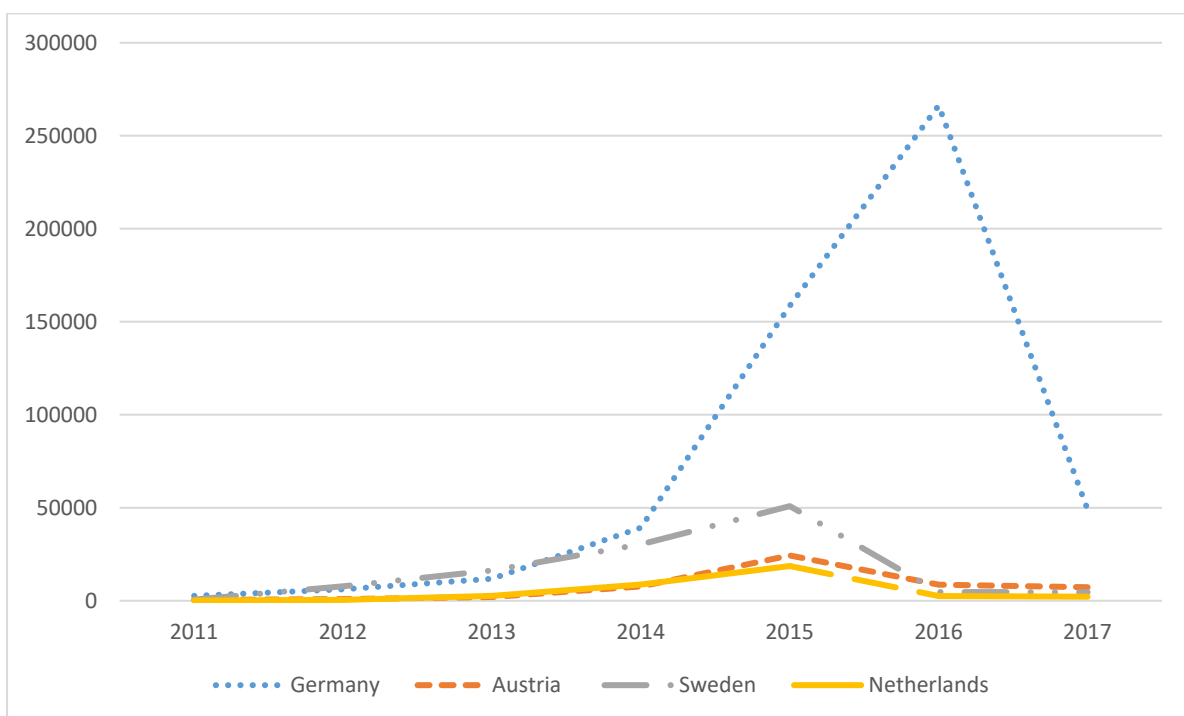


**Figure 4. Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, 2011-2017**



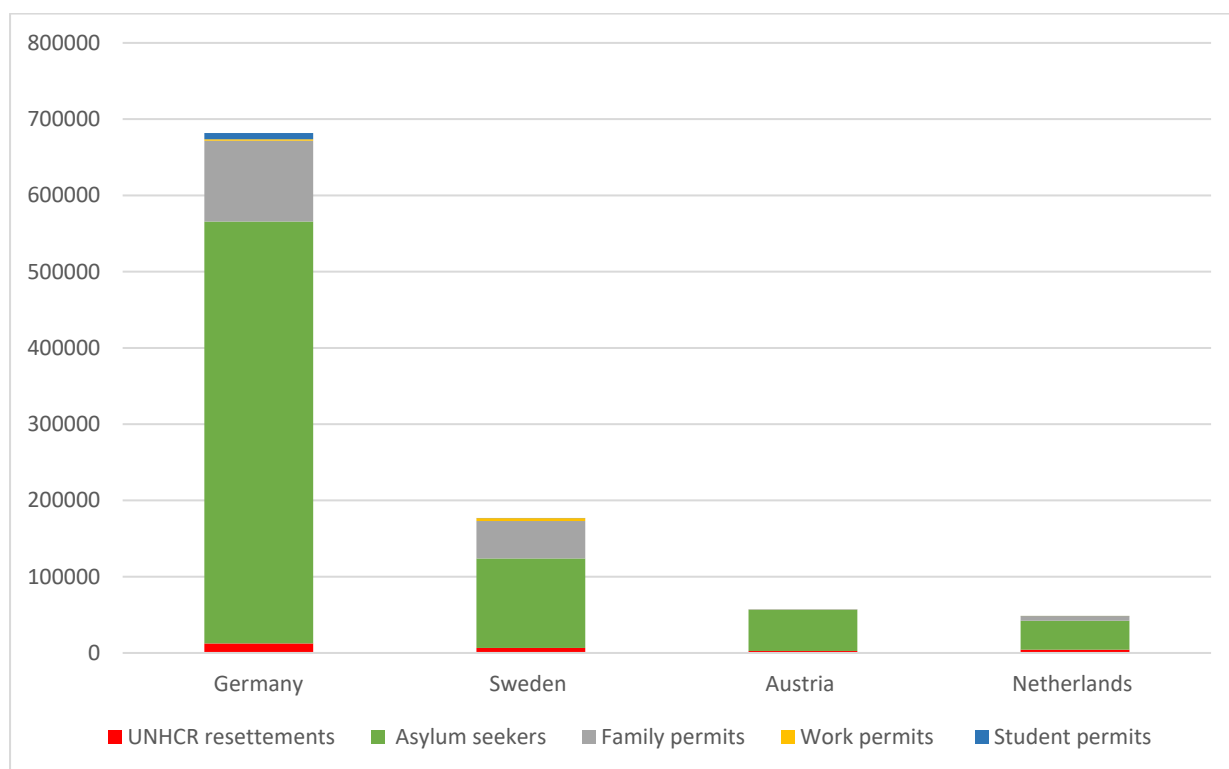
Source: own compilation, based on UNHCR's statistics

**Figure 5. Syrian asylum seekers in the largest receiving countries in EU, 2011-2017**



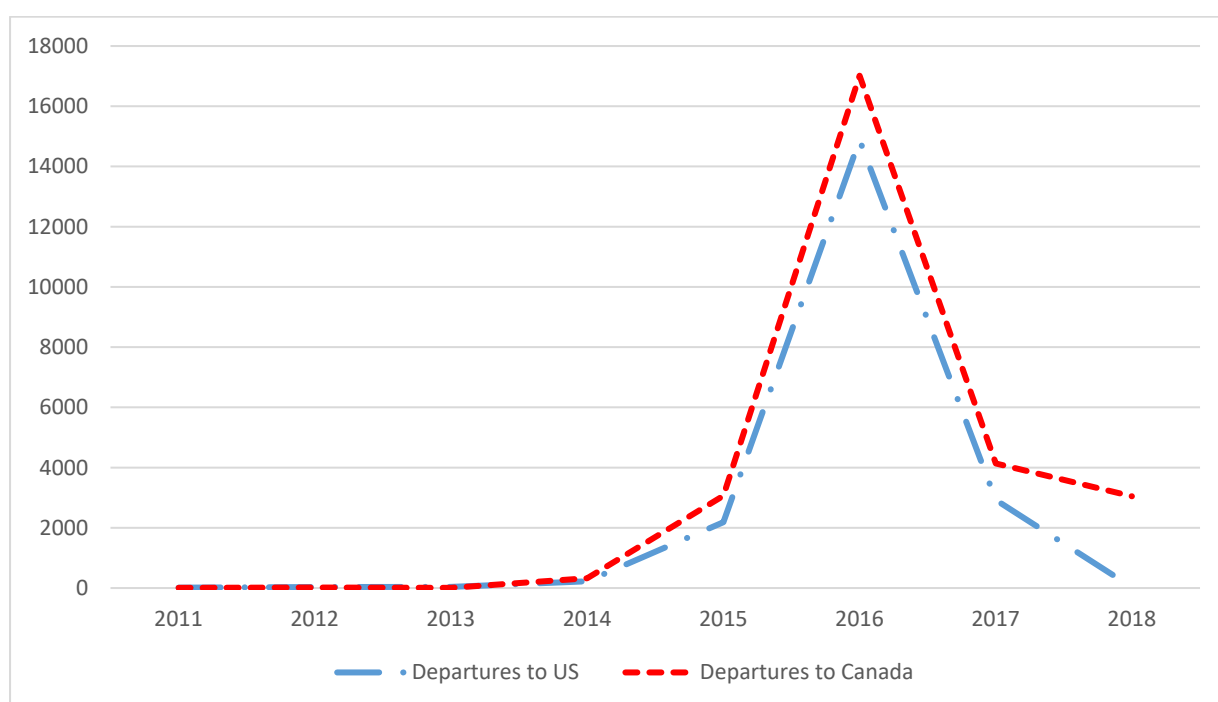
Source: own compilation, based on UNHCR's statistics

**Figure 6. Different categories of Syrians in four largest receivers of Syrians in EU**



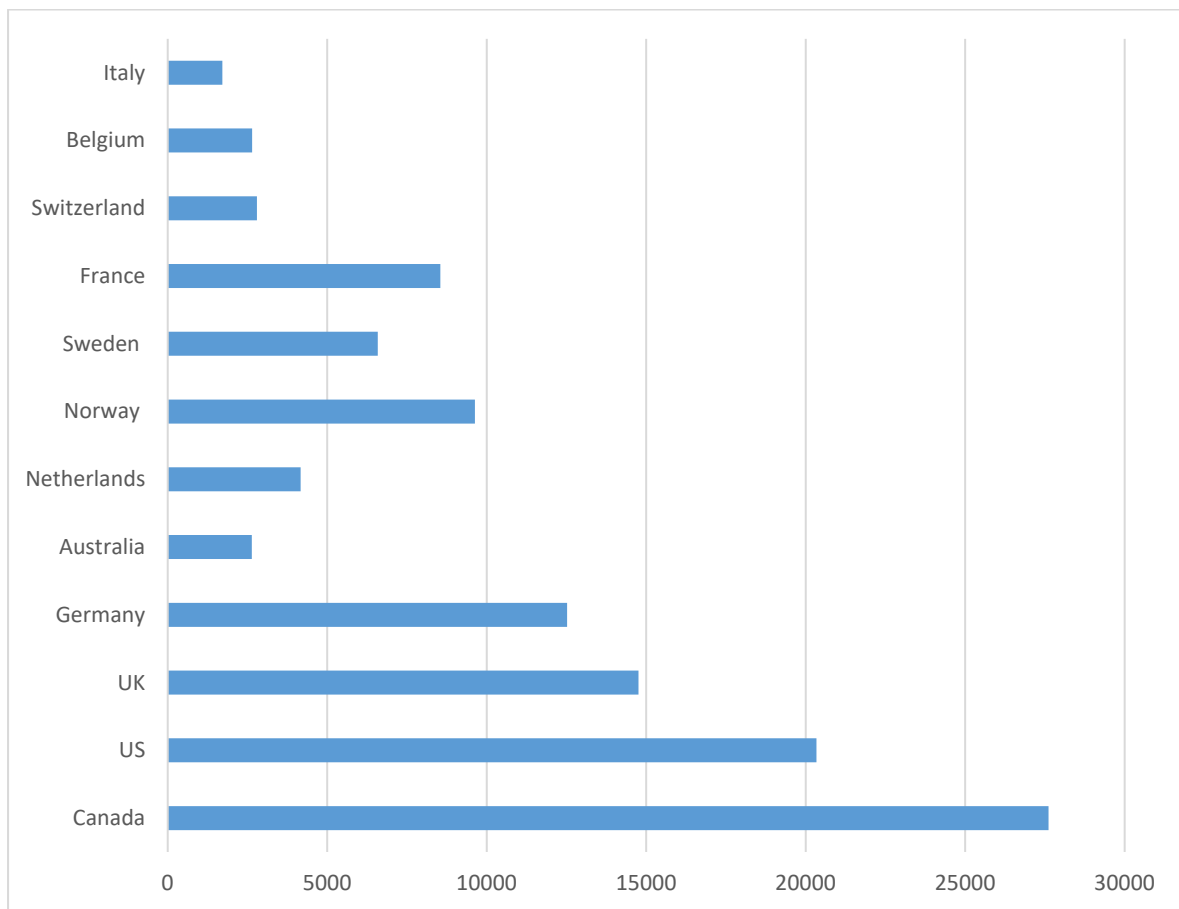
Source: own compilation, based on UNHCR's, OECD's statistics. Data on Asylum seekers and UNHCR resettlements are collected by UNHCR covering period 2011-2018, while statistics on family permits, work permits, and student permits issued to Syrians are collected by OECD covering period 2010-2017.

**Figure 7: UNHCR Resettlement of Syrians to Canada and United States**



Source: own compilation, based on UNHCR's statistics

**Figure 8. Resettlement of Syrian refugees via UNHCR's resettlement programme (12 largest receivers between 2011-2018)**



Source: own compilation, based on UNHCR's statistics