

Syrian Refugee Migration, Transitions in Migrant Statuses and Future Scenarios of Syrian Mobility

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the international migrations and statuses of people who left Syria after the outbreak of the civil war. In addition to exploring the dynamics of Syrian refugee migrations since 2011, we also discuss future prospects and possibilities of return. The ambition of the article is twofold. First, we aim to develop and nuance the typology of migrations of Syrians. Secondly, the article seeks to explore useful lessons from former large-scale refugee migrations; that is, knowledge which may hopefully contribute to preparing the relevant institutions and organisations for Syrian migrations in the eventual post-war period. Based on experiences from other post-conflict situations, several possible future scenarios of Syrian migrations are discussed. The proposed typologies of migrants and repatriation regimes may help us understand the nuances, the dynamic of status change and the complexity of the forced migrations. It is maintained that migration trends, reception, and repatriation conditions and policies are highly interconnected. Refugees' responses to reception and repatriation regimes result in transitions in their legal statuses in receiving countries and changing motivations for migration and repatriation.

KEYWORDS: asylum seekers, refugees, refugee policies, refugee return, Syria

1. INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the refugee and migrant outflows that have been generated by the war in Syria. In combination, refugees' human agency and the responses of receiving countries to the inflows of Syrian refugees have resulted in distinct patterns of refugee flows and a variety of *changing* legal categories of Syrian refugees and migrants. Our study fits within the strand of recent research that has explored the reception policies and conditions Syrians have faced in a range of different states.¹

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1 L. Turner, "Explaining the (non-) Encampment of Syrian Refugees: Security, Class and the Labour Market in Lebanon and Jordan", *Mediterranean politics*, 20(3), 2015, 386–404; N.E.G. Aras & Z.S. Mencutek, "The International Migration and Foreign Policy Nexus: The Case of Syrian Refugee Crisis and Turkey", *Migration Letters*, 12 (3), 2015, 193–208; M. Janmyr, "ProClarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian

Drawing on these studies, this article develops a categorisation of the altering patterns of Syrian migrations and the concomitant migrant statuses that appeared largely as a response to the variety of policies and conditions that the migrants were confronted with in the host states.

The dynamics of change in migrant statuses is thus the centrepiece of this study whose concrete ambitions are twofold. First, we aim to offer a more exhaustive conceptualisation of Syrian mobility after initiation of the war in 2011. Of importance is that this conceptualisation captures the dynamic of migrant status changes in a way that goes well beyond more common, formal definitions of asylum seekers and refugees, such as those used by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and host-country authorities. The second aim of our conceptualisation is to include in the typology possible future prospects, including the conceivable transformations of reception regimes and refugee statuses in the post-war period.

In 2019, after some eight years of fighting, it appeared that the Syrian conflict was approaching its final stage. Among politicians and scholars alike, this resulted in an increased focus on the issue of the return of Syrian refugees. Several recent research reports acknowledge the relevance of discussing possible future mobility prospects that may unfold in Syria henceforth. For example, since 2017 the UNHCR has published several regional surveys on Syrian refugees' perceptions of and intentions to return to Syria.² Furthermore, in a recent report published by the World Bank, researchers develop a quantitative simulation model of push and pull factors and present various return scenarios that may hopefully contribute to preparing the relevant institutions and organisations for Syrian migrations in the eventual post-war period.³ Such contributions are important and timely. Yet, we believe that, in order to obtain a complete picture of the likely emerging migration patterns, the aforementioned surveys and quantitative models need to be supplemented with experiences from refugee migrations in other, comparable post-conflict contexts.

We draw primarily on experiences from Bosnia–Herzegovina. Partly this is because we are particularly familiar with this case. More substantially, the Bosnian and Syrian conflicts share several similarities. Both countries suffered complex full-scale wars that involved several local factions as well as regional and international actors. The wars in both countries also resulted in rapid and large-scale displacements of people, affecting more than half of the population in each country. However, there are also dissimilarities as each of the conflicts, and the migrations that they triggered, happened in quite specific geographical and historical contexts. As we shall see, there are several other differences between the two cases as well, such as the magnitude of destruction, the size of the displaced population, the contents of the reception

Refugees in Lebanon”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 35(4), 2016, 58–78; A.J. Knudsen, “The Great Escape? Converging Refugee Crises in Tyre, Lebanon”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 37(1), 2018, 96–115; F. Baban, S. Ilcan & K. Rygiel, “Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Pathways to Precarity, Differential Inclusion, and Negotiated Citizenship Rights”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(1), 2017, 41–57; R. Mhaissen & E. Hodges, *Unpacking Return: Syrian Refugees' Conditions and Concerns*, Beirut: SAWA for Development and Aid, 2019.

2 See <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/fifth-regional-survey-syrian-refugees-perceptions-and-intentions-return-syria-rpis> (last visited 28 Aug. 2019).

3 World Bank, *The Mobility of Displaced Syrians: An Economic and Social Analysis*, Washington DC, WB Research reports, 2019

regimes that the refugees faced, and the migration options they had in different stages of the conflict. Therefore, we will also relate to experiences from other post-war societies, such as Afghanistan, Kosovo, Lebanon, and Croatia.⁴ We believe that they may teach us important lessons. Surely, such analogies have significant limitations, and they cannot be stretched too far considering that each post-conflict context has its own idiosyncrasies. The migration systems that emerge during the post-conflict period are embedded in unique historical contexts – *inter alia*, the specific migration and return regimes that enable and restrict people's mobility in post-conflict societies. Nevertheless, we argue that some aspects of the former post-conflict migrations are clearly applicable to the Syrian case.

The article is divided into several interrelated parts. In the first part, we outline the main categories of international migrants from Syria and analyse the status transformations among these migrants that emerged since the start of the civil war. In the second part, we discuss the future categories of Syrian migrants, migration prospects and the anticipated status transformations in the post-war period. Here, we argue that the post-conflict experiences from Bosnia–Herzegovina, together with lessons provided by other post-conflict societies, may be used to predict patterns and construct projections about Syrian migrations in the years ahead.

2. METHODOLOGY

Our conceptualisation of Syrian refugee migrations builds on relevant academic publications and on reports from the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and press releases and reports from various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). We combine these secondary data with statistics provided by the UNHCR, the UN's Population Division, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Pew Research Centre – and with our own earlier research.

In the period 2002–2019, we participated in several interconnected studies on refugee migrations pertinent to the discussion in this article. These studies may be divided into several categories. In the first category is research we did on *receiving countries in the Middle East*. Most of this research were desk studies conducted between 2016 and 2019, primarily focusing on the reception policies of the Persian/Arab Gulf countries and Syria's neighbouring countries.

In addition, in the period 2014–2019, we had meetings with employees of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Jordan, former employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Syria and Jordan, and employees of the UNHCR in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Jordan. The interviews and meetings centred on refugee reception and

4 See R. Black, "Return and Reconstruction in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Missing Link, or Mistaken Priority?" *SAIS Review*, 21(2), 2001, 177–199; W. Englbrecht, "Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo: Voluntary Return in Safety and Dignity?", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 23(3), 2004, 100–148; G. Hourani & E. Sansening-Dabbous, *Insecurity, Migration and Return: The Case of Lebanon Following the Summer 2006 War*, Florence, European University Institute, 2007; A. Monsutti, "Afghan Migratory Strategies and the Three Solutions to the Refugee Problem," *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 27(1), 2008, 58–73; M. Mesić & D. Bagić, "Serb Returnees in Croatia – the Question of Return Sustainability", *International Migration*, 48(2), 2010, 133–160; C. Karooma, *Reluctant to Return? The Primacy of Social Networks in the Repatriation of Rwandan Refugees in Uganda*, Working Paper Series No. 103, Oxford, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, 2014.

migration trends in Syria and in Syria's neighbouring countries. Our research on the host countries in the region also included interviews with refugees and migrants. In 2015–2020, we and our research partners in the region conducted interviews with Syrian and Iraqi refugees and migrants in Jordan, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. The interviews centred on their experiences with the context of reception and their migratory trajectories and plans.

The second category includes research we did on large-scale refugee migrations related to the *disintegration of Yugoslavia*. We participated in several fieldworks to Bosnia in 2002 and 2010, which included interviews with returnees and meetings with local migration specialists, representatives of Bosnian authorities and representatives of the UNHCR and local NGOs. In addition, we produced several overviews of secondary migrations at different stages of the Bosnian conflict, and we explored the experiences of the Bosnian diaspora and the migrants' transnational practices and their contacts with the home country.

The third category encompasses research on responses to large-scale migrations from Syria in *transit countries*. We interviewed refugees transiting Western Balkan in 2014 and 2015, and, in the period 2014–2019, we also participated in meetings and seminars with people working with refugees; representatives of migration authorities and specialists; and local NGO's in Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia, Greece, and Croatia. This research was combined with desk studies on local responses to increased refugee migrations in the region. We have also explored experiences in *the destination countries in the West*. Between 2017 and 2020, we participated in three shorter fieldworks in Norway where we met service providers working with refugees and asylum seekers in municipalities that received Syrian refugees. During these fieldworks, we also met refugees from Syria who migrated to Europe and Norway via different regular and irregular channels. These people shared with us their experiences of war, transit migration and their encounters with authorities and the reception systems in Europe and Scandinavia. We also gained valuable knowledge through participation at various specialised conferences and workshops on the reception of Syrian refugees. These sessions included discussions with migration specialists exploring Syrian migrations to Germany, Turkey, Sweden, Australia, Norway, Finland – and several other countries.

In sum: the discussion in this article is based on extensive desk studies on various regimes for the reception of Syrians, combined with the invaluable experiences we accumulated from the above-mentioned studies and encounters.⁵ These sources have

5 See M. Valenta & S. Ramet, *Bosnian Diaspora, Integration in Transnational Communities*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2011; M. Valenta & Z. Strabac, "The Dynamics of Bosnian Refugee Migrations in the 1990s, Current Migration Trends and Future Prospects", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 32(3), 2013, 1–22; M. Valenta, D. Zuparic-Iljic & T. Vidovic, "The Reluctant Asylum-Seekers: Migrants at the Southeastern Frontiers of the European Migration System", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 34 (3), 2015, 95–113; M. Valenta & J. Jakobsen, "Mixed Migrations to the Gulf: An Empirical Analysis of Migrations from Unstable and Refugee-producing Countries to the GCC, 1960–2015", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 36 (2), 2017, 33–56; 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," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 54(1), 2018, 22–47; A. Kvittingen, M. Valenta, H. Tabbara et al., "The Conditions and Migratory Aspirations of Syrian and Iraqi Refugees in Jordan", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 32(1), 2019, 106–124; M. Valenta, M.N. Lønning, J. Jakobsen et al., "European Asylum Policies and the Stranded Asylum Seekers in Southeastern Europe", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 32(1), 2019, 162–171

provided us with multiple insights on developments in the reception systems, the corresponding transformations in migrant statuses and the changes in migration patterns in post-war societies. These insights are supplemented by and contrasted to findings from studies on refugee migrations in other post-war contexts.⁶

3. THE WAR IN SYRIA AND CATEGORIES OF SYRIAN MIGRANTS

Estimates are that the war in Syria has produced around 13 million displaced people (Connor 2018), which encompasses over 60 per cent of Syria's pre-war population. According to official estimates, almost a half of these people, or 5.6 million, are international migrants/refugees, while 6.1 million are internally displaced persons (IDPs) still residing in Syria.⁷ The internal displacements were, however, for millions of Syrians but just an initial stage in the migration process; they eventually metamorphosed into *emigrations* from the country. These emigrations have spawned a number of different categories of migrants – formal as well as informal ones. Our data suggest that we can, among other categories, distinguish between Syrian refugees, asylum seekers, forced migrants, transit migrants, stranded migrants, unaccompanied minors, irregular migrants, mixed migrants, naturalised migrants, labour migrants, entrepreneurs, investors, and students. Moreover, this list is only partial, and many of the categories are not mutually exclusive. And neither are the categories static, as we argue later in the article.

With the exception of Israel, Syria's immediate neighbours are the states that host the largest numbers of Syrian refugees. This includes Turkey (which is the biggest such host), Lebanon and Jordan (the second and third largest receiver, respectively), while Iraq is the fifth biggest receiver (Germany is number four).⁸ Figure 1 shows Syrian refugee stocks in ten largest host countries.

One can categorise refugees in the host countries in various ways. For example, distinctions can be made according to the type of accommodation provided to them; the trajectory they have followed during their migration experience; their formal status and type of residence; the social rights they enjoy; their socioeconomic position in the receiving society; and their living conditions.⁹ It is important to distinguish among these categories as they may help spur new migrant statuses of relevance for the patterns of Syrian migrations in the post-war period. For example, we may expect that very few Syrians who have been awarded with permanent protection in Western Europe will return to Syria or migrate to third countries. However, those who merely received temporary protection status may face various hardships. When temporary statuses cease, this could result in a transformation into irregular statuses, involuntary returns, and secondary migration.¹⁰

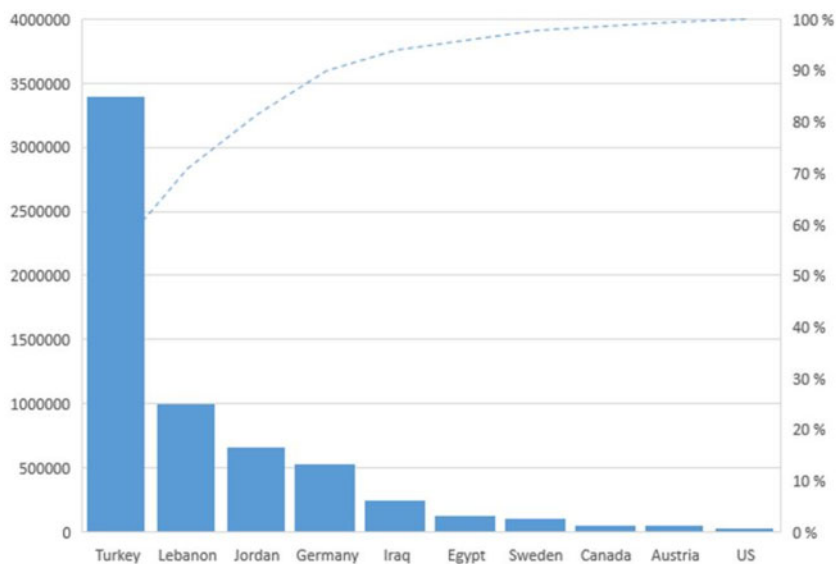
6 See W.H., Moore & S.M. Shellman, "Refugee or Internally Displaced Person?: To Where Should One Flee?", *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(5), 2006, 599–622; W.H., Moore & S.M. Shellman, "Whither Will They Go? A Global Study of Refugees' Destinations, 1965–1995", *International Studies Quarterly*, 51(4), 2007, 811–834; Monsutti, 2008; Karooma, 2014.

7 See https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions (last visited 28 June 2019).

8 It is worth noting that the actual number of refugees in neighbouring countries probably exceeds those in official statistics.

9 See Turner, 2015; Aras & Mencutek, 2015; Janmyr, 2016.

10 See K. Koser & R. Black, "Limits to Harmonisation: The Temporary Protection of Refugees in European Union", *International Migration*, 37(3), 1999, 521–543; see also Valenta & Strabac, 2013

Figure 1. Syrian refugee stocks in ten largest host countries.

As for the first of these distinctions – type of accommodation – one can separate between Syrians who reside in informal settlements and those who live in some sort of private accommodation, or in refugee camps and reception centres for asylum seekers. The vast majority of Syrian refugees live outside the refugee camps. A major feature of the Syrian displacement crisis is that it is mainly an urban phenomenon. Less than 10 percent of all city-based Syrian refugees live in camps,¹¹ and humanitarian aid policies are not in place to cater for this group of refugees, which result in many being self-settled, unemployed, and unaided. This also has policy implications for future return, as will be discussed later in the article.¹²

A useful distinction can also be made with regard to types of protection and reception standards. On the one hand, many Syrians are granted permanent protection and generous social rights. This includes refugees who have been resettled through the UNHCR's official programme and those who have been awarded permanent refugee status in Western Europe. Others have been less fortunate, though, enjoying only very scarce access to basic services and having only temporary residence entitlement. Within the latter group fall the vast majority of refugees in Syria's neighbouring states: Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. These states, which are the top three receivers of Syrians, offer only temporary protection to the refugees. Furthermore,

11 See https://products.hiu.state.gov/Syria_ConflictWithoutBorders_Displacement_2018Feb09_HIU_U1750.pdf (last visited 25 July 2019).

12 See <https://carnegie-mec.org/2018/04/16/policy-framework-for-refugees-in-lebanon-and-jordan-pub-76058>; See <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5> (last visited 24 February 2019);

See https://website.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/books/20180601_101_facts_and_figures_on_syrian_refugee_crisis.pdf see also <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36> (last visited 24 February 2019).

reception standards are usually fairly deficient, which often acts to spur motivations for transit and fragmented migrations.¹³

As for migration policies, we can distinguish between regimes that have, at least in certain periods, offered regular immigration opportunities to large numbers of Syrians, and those that have flatly denied Syrians any legal access.¹⁴ Syria's neighbours generally fall within the former category, while most European states are associated with the latter. In the European context, we may distinguish between Syrians who entered the host countries in European Union (EU) via irregular pathways and those who arrived via legal migration channels. In the former category are Syrian asylum seekers, while in the latter are primarily Syrians who were resettled via the UNHCR's resettlement programme and reunited family members. Figure 2 shows the composition of Syrian migrant stock in four largest receivers of Syrians in EU.

As we can see from the figure, asylum seekers were the largest group. Syrian asylum seeker normally cannot enter Western European countries legally; those who do manage to enter are often offered both permanent protection and fairly generous integration assistance. Still, the substantial increase in the numbers of Syrian asylum seekers in Western Europe in 2015 effectuated the more frequent use of subsidiary or temporary protection status.¹⁵

Finally, some receiving countries that do not provide refugee status to Syrians under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees are not included in the UNHCR statistics. Bakewell reminds us that we have to be quite attentive when we construct analytical categories within the field of refugee migration studies; among other things, we have to take care to distinguish between categories of policy and analysis, which are only partially overlapping.¹⁶ He points out:

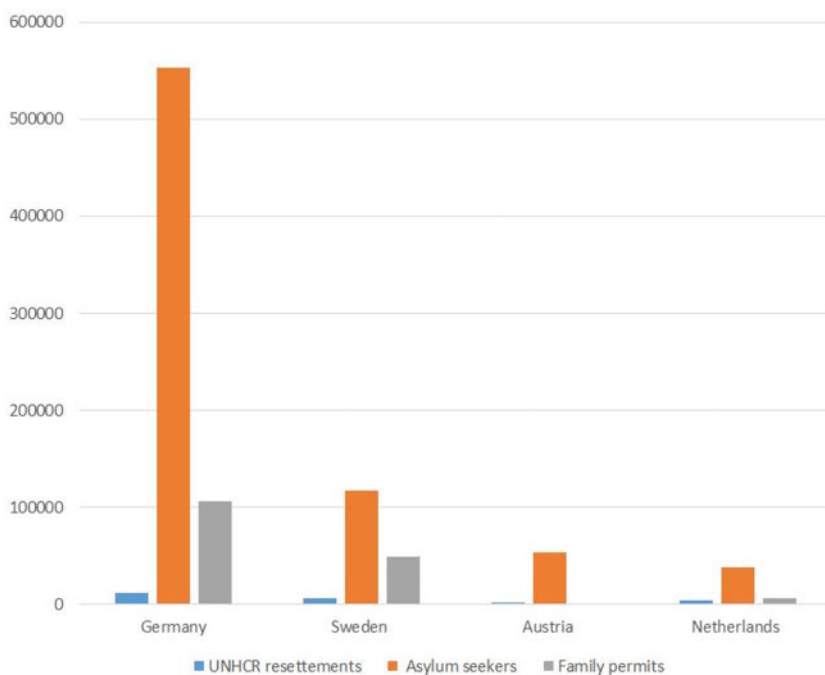
...the search for policy relevance has encouraged researchers to take the categories, concepts and priorities of policy makers and practitioners as their initial frame of reference for identifying their areas of study and formulating research questions. . . academic researchers in refugee studies have 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-

13 See Turner, 2015; Janmyr, 2016; See also U. Korkut, "Pragmatism, Moral Responsibility or Policy Change: The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Selective Humanitarianism in the Turkish Refugee Regime", *Comparative Migration Studies*, 4(2), 2016, 1–20.

14 See F. Düvell, "The 'Great Migration' of Summer 2015: Analysing the Assemblage of Key Drivers in Turkey", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(12), 2019, 2227–2240; see F. Fakhoury, "Multi-level Governance and Migration Politics in the Arab World: the Case of Syria's Displacement", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(8), 2019, 1310–1326; See also Knudsen, 2018.

15 In 2015, 96 per cent of Syrian refugees were granted permanent refugee status in Germany. In 2016 and 2017, however, German authorities gave subsidiary protection to 42 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively, of asylum seekers from Syria. We may observe similar trend in other European countries. For an overview of practices in different EU member states, see https://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/shadow-reports/aida_refugee_rights_subsiding.pdf (last visited 24 February 2019). See also <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/asylum-procedure/treatment-specific-nationalities> (last visited 25 July 2019). See [http://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 visited 25 July 2019).

16 O. Bakewell, "Research Beyond the Categories: The Importance of Policy Irrelevant Research into Forced Migration", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(4), 2008, 432–453.

Figure 2. Different categories of Syrians in four largest receivers of Syrians in EU.

reliance on policy categories is a fundamental weakness in the field of refugee studies. In particular, it leaves large groups of forced migrants invisible in both research and policy.¹⁷

For many Syrians, life as a labour migrant – or some other non-refugee status – may be seen as a better option than temporary refugee status, dependence of humanitarian aid or living in refugee camps in Syria’s neighbouring countries. Those states are not included in the UNHCR statistics; yet, they are hosting many Syrians who either did not have the opportunity or resources to reach their preferred destination countries via refugee-resettlement pathways, or did not want to expose themselves to the dangers associated with illegal migrations routes to Europe.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries – which encompass Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain – are the largest receivers of Syrians who do not enjoy refugee status. This is because the GCC states’ *kafala* regime has attracted hundreds of thousands of temporary labour migrants from Syria. This was the case before the war broke out in 2011 as well; the UN estimates (which may well understate real numbers) suggest that in 2010 more than 500,000 Syrians resided in Saudi Arabia, with a further 70,000 spread across the five other GCC states. In addition, a substantial number of Syrians migrated to the

17 Bakewell, 2008, 432–436.

GCC after the war commenced. Again, according to data from the UN, the Syrian migrant stock in Saudi Arabia increased by nearly 250,000 in the period 2011–2017. Similar numbers apply for the UAE as well, while Kuwait received an additional 120,000 Syrians in this period.¹⁸ Virtually none of these migrants are defined as Convention Refugees. Instead, they are counted as temporary labour migrants, which means that they are excluded from the UNHCR's refugee statistics. A case can nevertheless be made that Syrians in the GCC – both those who arrived prior to and during the war – have, after the war started, harboured other motives than purely economic ones to prolong their temporary residence.¹⁹

4. THE DYNAMIC OF OUT MIGRATIONS AND STATUS TRANSITIONS

Theorists on international migration policies propose that the migration system should be defined by: (i) a set of interacting elements (e.g. flows of people, strategies of migrants and various institutions and migration policies of governments); and (ii) the dynamics governing the way in which the system and the elements develop and change through different feedback mechanisms.²⁰ Various migrant statuses and migration trajectories have proliferated in interactions with the various reception regimes. In this section, we want to stress that these migration flows and statuses are not in any way static. Indeed, they are changing in the nexus of interactions between the above-mentioned elements of the system and personal agencies of Syrians, i.e. their responses to life circumstances as defined by the outlined structures and regimes. Our empirical material contains many examples of such dynamics. Due to space limitations, however, we only present a selection of the many intricate and dynamic trajectories.

One such example that clearly demonstrates the complexity of the migrations and of the transitions in statuses is offered by Syrians whom we encountered in Jordan. There, we met people who at first had fled their homes and found shelter in other parts of Syria, thereby becoming IDPs. Later, they proceeded to move to Jordan, thus changing from IDP status to the status of international refugees. Initially, they lived in the Zaatari refugee camp, close to the Syrian border. Later, they found accommodation in the capital, Amman, where they had different statuses – such as that of refugee, of irregular migrant and of temporary labour migrant. Some of these people were waiting for resettlement to third countries though the UNHCR's refugee admittance programme. Some of them were eventually admitted for resettlement and awarded with permanent protection in host countries outside the region.

Another case that neatly illustrates the dynamic and complexity of migrant trajectories and transitions in status is one that we have encountered during our studies in the GCC. It involves Syrians who originally migrated on visitor visas from

18 It is difficult to assess realities and scale of Syrian migrations to the GCC, due to the lack of accurate data. Therefore, we rely on UN's general estimates and various local sources. See

<https://www.apnews.com/9cfb46113644483798391911c841a2a7> (last visited 25 February 2019); see <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/2-8-million-syrians-moved-to-gcc-since-start-of-civil-war-1.82927> (last visited 25 February 2019); see also <https://gulfnnews.com/world/mena/kuwait-extends-residency-permits-for-syrians-1.1577117> (last visited 25 July 2019).

19 Valenta & Jakobsen, 2017.

20 See Bakewell, 2014, 310.

neighbouring countries to the GCC, but who then proceeded to overstay their visas and thus become illegal migrants. After temporary amnesties were instituted by the GCC governments, they regularised their status, becoming temporary labour migrants instead.²¹ Complex migrant trajectories and status transitions were also observed among many of the refugees who migrated from Syria to Lebanon during 2015 and who continued further to Egypt and later to Europe via Mediterranean routes. Furthermore, Tripoli in Lebanon was in periods an important transit hub for Syrians who continued from there with boats to Turkey and further to Western Europe. During these journeys, these people also oscillated between different irregular and regular statuses.²²

Status transitions may also be detected among many of the Syrian refugees who originally fled to Turkey. They lived for a period there; but with the establishment of the Balkan corridor, they migrated northward from Turkey.²³ While in Turkey, some of them were formally defined as refugees, but with the further migration to Europe, their status changed. They first become irregular migrants, and in the Western Balkans, they oscillated between statuses of irregular migrant, (reluctant) asylum seeker and transit migrant.²⁴ After arriving in other European destination countries, their status changed yet again: from irregular migrant to asylum seeker, and from asylum seeker to permanent refugee.

For the majority of refugees, a prolongation of conflict in their home country spurs them into focusing ever more on the long-term prospects of integrating into their host country. If such prospects are inadequate, they will instead seek them in a third country.²⁵ This has generally been the case for refugees in Syria's neighbouring states – and for Syrians in Southern Europe, notably Greece and Italy, which have provided only less-than-sufficient reception and integration conditions for the bulk of Syrian refugees. These countries have consequently functioned largely as both transit and receiving states for Syrians.

- 21 Large amnesties were implemented in Kuwait, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia (the largest receiver of Syrian migrants). Most of the countries in the Gulf have implemented amnesties and allowed visitor visas to families of Syrian residents in the GCC; see De Bel-Air, *A Note on Syrian Refugees in the Gulf: Attempting to Assess Data and Policies*, Florence, European University Institute, 2015; see also G, Hitman, "Charity before Hospitality: Gulf States Policy towards Syrian Refugees", *Asian Affairs*, 50(1), 2019, 80–101.
- 22 They did not need in periods visas to enter Turkey, but were required visas to enter Lebanon. They had to use irregular migration pathways from Turkey to enter Greece and West Europe, see <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/lebanon-tripoli-transit-hub-syrian-refugees-151106140234138.html> (last accessed 25 July 2019).
- 23 The window of opportunity that triggered such secondary movements was the opening of the migrant corridor via Turkey and the Western Balkans to Western Europe.
- 24 Many did their best to keep their status as irregular migrants during their transit to the preferred destinations in Western Europe. They did that since they were aware that the 'Dublin agreement' agreed on by EU member states forbids multiple asylum applications in different member states, and thus that registering in any transit country in Europe would undermine their chances to obtain refugee status in preferred destinations in the core of the EU.
- 25 See M. Collyer, "Stranded Migrants and the Fragmented Journey", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 23(3), 2010; see also Knudsen, 2018; See also <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-net/work/2015/oct/25/six-reasons-why-syrians-are-fleeing-to-europe-in-increasing-numbers> (last visited 25 July 2019).

4.1. Dynamic of transitions within transit and fragmented migrations to Europe

The above-mentioned migrant trajectories and the status transitions sometimes unfolded slowly within the frame of ‘fragmented migrations’.²⁶ In such cases, the refugees stayed for longer periods, sometimes years, at different places and countries, before arriving at their perceived final destinations. Their accounts indicated that various redirections in migration trajectories, and the status transitions that these people experienced, were not planned in advance; they rather happened as a response to changing circumstances of life in exile.²⁷ Yet, we can also observe transitions between fragmented and transit migrations, and from transit to stranded/fragmented migrations. For example, in 2015, we met refugees who were transiting the Balkan corridor. These people perhaps represent the clearest example of swift transit migrations.²⁸

Figure 3 shows developments in numbers of Syrian asylum seekers in the largest receiving countries in Western Europe, where the peak in numbers and the subsequent decline may be associated with the rise and fall of the Balkan corridor.²⁹

During a short period, hundreds of thousands of Syrians made their transit journeys to Europe while oscillating between different irregular and regular statuses. For example, most Syrians entered Turkey as regular migrants and got temporary protection status in Turkey. However, during 2015, many of these people decided to migrate to their desired destinations in Western Europe via the Western Balkans, entering Greece as irregular migrants. Afterwards, continuing their journeys toward Western Europe, they entered Macedonia and Serbia, where they got a short-term transit visa and in this way regained their status as regular migrants. Thereafter, they reentered illegally the EU Schengen Area at the border between Serbia and Hungary and transited the Schengen zone as irregular migrants. Finally, when they reached their desired destinations in Western Europe, they became asylum seekers and refugees, thereby regaining regular status.

The closure of the Balkan corridor in spring 2016 led to an end of swift transit migrations and to a reduction in the numbers of Syrian asylum seekers in the core of the European Union. The closure of the corridor also led to an increase in the numbers of stranded asylum seekers from Syria in Southern Europe. Since 2016, many new measures aimed at deterring asylum seekers have been implemented in Europe.³⁰ These measures have altered migrant trajectories. On the one hand, it is now, after the closure of the Balkan corridor, much more difficult to reach the destination countries in Western Europe. On the other hand, new illegal routes to the EU have emerged – such as those through Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia–

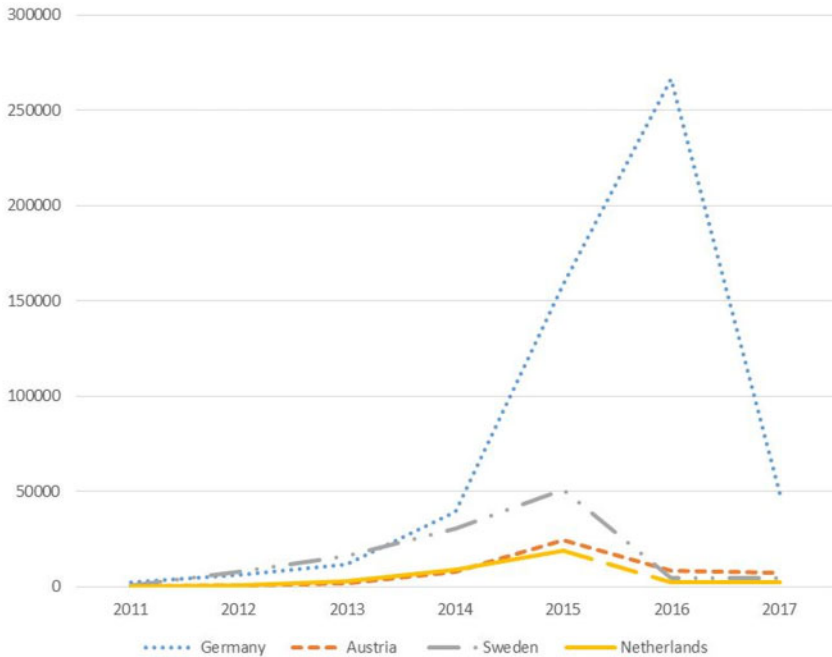
26 Collyer, 2010.

27 For example, our Syrian informants spoke about friends and relatives who moved to neighbouring countries with a hope that the war would soon be over, planning eventually to return. After prolonged stays in the neighbouring countries, they decided to enter a new stage in their fragmented migrations.

28 Later, after the closure of the corridor, we met Syrians in Bosnia, who after several interruptions of their journey to Western Europe along the ‘Balkan route’ were now stuck close to the EU border, in the Bosnian town of Bihać.

29 See Valenta et al., 2019

30 For an extensive discussion on these deterring measures see Düvell, 2019.

Figure 3. Syrian asylum seekers in the largest receiving countries in EU, 2011–2017.

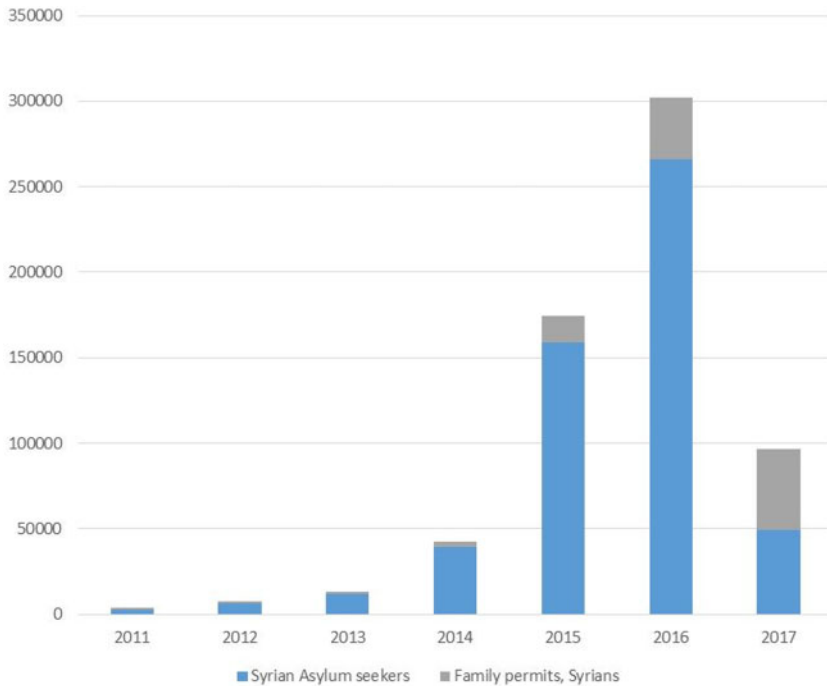
Herzegovina.³¹ Furthermore, after the closure of the Balkan corridor in 2016, the composition of irregular and regular flows has also changed: while the numbers of asylum seekers have been drastically reduced, the relative share of family permits has increased. Figure 4 shows changes in the composition of Syrian migrations to Germany, the largest receiver of Syrians in EU.

In addition to the above-described trends, we can also anticipate that new categories of migrants will emerge in the future. One such category is *returnees*. Thousands of IDPs and refugees have already returned to their homes, which they did as soon as the minimal conditions for their return had been created.³² However, discussions on Syrian migrations in the eventual post-war period have intensified since 2018, in conjunction with perceptions that the war was approaching its final stage.³³ Several studies show that a majority of Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries wish to

31 See https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis_for_2018.pdf (last visited 26 February 2019); see <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/06/04/region-on-alert-as-migrants-open-new-balkan-route-06-03-2018/> (last visited 26 February 2019).

32 See <https://data2.unhcr.org/ar/documents/download/64999> (last visited 26 February 2019); see https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions (last visited 26 February 2019).

33 Authorities in the receiving countries have already started to forecast the return of Syrian refugees to their home country. See <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/erdogan-safe-zones-syria-refugees-return-190128094136080.html> (last visited 26 February 2019); see <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mid-east-crisis-russia-syria-refugees/russian-envoy-urges-syrian-refugee-return-idUSKBN1KG2C8> (last visited 26 February 2019).

Figure 4. Numbers of Syrian asylum seekers and family permits given to Syrians in Germany.

return provided, that is, that the preconditions for a safe and sustainable return are fulfilled.³⁴ However, lessons from other post-conflict societies – such as Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Croatia, and Afghanistan – indicate that for a large proportion of refugees these preconditions will likely not be in place for many years.³⁵ Therefore, we can expect that the post-war migration trajectories of Syrians will be equally complex as those that prevailed during the conflict. It is against this background that we, on the next pages, discuss in more detail the prospects of Syrian migrations in an eventual post-conflict Syria.

5. PROSPECTS OF SYRIAN MIGRATIONS AND LESSONS FROM OTHER POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES

Migrations in different post-conflict societies have several common features with respect to experiences with return migrations, internal migrations and out-migrations.

34 See https://website.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/books/20180601_101_facts_and_figures_on_syrian_refugee_crisis.pdf (last visited 26 February 2019).

35 See Koser & Black, 1999; See also Englbrecht, 2004; R. Black & S. Gent, “Sustainable Return in Post-conflict Contexts”, *International Migration*, 44(3), 2006, 15–38; See Monsutti 2008; See Mesić & Bagić, 2016; See also http://www.artf.af/images/uploads/AFG_ILM_Background_Paper_2a_Online_-_Migration_Patterns_-_Macro.pdf (accessed 26 February 2019).

As we are especially familiar with migrations in post-war Bosnia, we use that case as our central reference.

Bosnian and Syrian refugee migrations share some important characteristics. In both countries, forced migrations occurred extremely rapidly. Both have also experienced complex, devastating full-scale wars that involved multiple local, regional and international combatants. Furthermore, neighbouring countries were in both of these cases heavily involved in the conflict, and they also emerged as the largest receivers of refugees.

Syria and Bosnia emerged from the conflicts as broken and unstable countries. In both contexts, refugee returns were eminently unsustainable as the refugees faced considerable insecurity, discrimination and economic problems. However, there were also many differences: *inter alia*, with respect to the length and the scale of the conflict, the prevalence of a temporary migration regime and the options available for secondary migration to Europe and other countries. Furthermore, Syria's and Bosnia's neighbouring countries, as well as the receiving countries in Europe, had and have specific agendas and approaches that have produced different migration opportunities for refugees at various stages of the conflicts.³⁶ In what follows, we discuss these similarities and dissimilarities in more detail. As we will see over the next pages, the two contexts differ in several other ways, which have resulted in dissimilar migration trends in the post-war period.

5.1. Patterns of Bosnian refugee migrations

During the 1992–1995 Bosnian War, two million people – that is, half of the Bosnian population – were uprooted and forced to flee their homes. Indeed, many of them were displaced multiple times, transiting between IDP status, refugee status and other statuses. It is estimated that 1.2 million people left the country during the conflict. Bosnia's neighbours, in particular Croatia and Serbia, became large receiving and transit countries, while Germany, Austria, and Sweden emerged as the largest receivers of Bosnian refugees in Western and Northern Europe.

Bosnians were initially granted collective temporary protection in most Western European countries. In many states, this status was later converted, though, so that Bosnians were granted permanent protection that provided pathways to permanent residence and citizenship. However, several countries – including Germany, the largest receiver of Bosnian refugees – upheld the temporary protection regime, the *Duldung*.³⁷ After the war ended, Germany instituted a large-scale repatriation programme for Bosnian refugees.³⁸

Repatriation policies towards Bosnian refugees may be categorised according to three major dimensions which characterised the various regimes: protection policy, return policy and return assistance. The first two dimensions are closely interrelated: the degree of coercion in the return policy was a logical consequence of the

36 For example, the Middle East region was from 2015 subsumed into the EU's migration policies to effect regional containment of refugees and an "externalization" of migration control. In contrast, during the Bosnian war, and in the post-war period, European countries, Australia and the US allowed a large (legal) influx of Bosnian refugees.

37 Valenta & Strabac, 2013.

38 Koser & Black, 1999; Valenta & Ramet, 2011; Valenta & Strabac, 2013.

temporary protection regime chosen by some of the receiving countries. The degree of return assistance did not follow the same logic; some of the countries that were not so generous regarding their protection policy were at the same time among the most proactive ones on the return issue, typically offering refugees pay-to-go schemes.³⁹

While Germany forced Bosnian refugees to return, those states that created voluntary repatriation regimes offered instead possibilities for integration and legal pathways to permanent residence. The existence of such opportunities predictably resulted in few voluntary returns. For example, less than 10 per cent of Bosnian refugees in the Scandinavian countries and in the Netherlands have returned, even though these states offered Bosnian refugees the most extensive voluntary return programmes and pay-to-go schemes. In contrast, a majority of Bosnians did return from the countries that had chosen the coercive return regimes. For example, after the peace agreement was signed, almost 300,000 Bosnians moved from Germany.⁴⁰

To escape coerced return from Germany and other countries, tens of thousands of Bosnians chose to migrate to third countries, such as the United States and Australia, or Croatia and Serbia. The so-called 'chain migration' – with migrants assisting family members, friends and neighbours to migrate and join them in desired destinations in third countries – has been a key feature of the post-war migration of Bosnians. Furthermore, tens of thousands of those who were returned to Bosnia-Herzegovina never migrated to their original domiciles, as their homes were situated in parts of the country now dominated by another ethnic group or faction.⁴¹

In the first part of article, we distinguished between Syrian refugees who got permanent residence and those who did not. Other categories and distinctions were also introduced, such as that between Syrians who were regular and irregular migrants, between labour migrants and refugees and between those who lived in refugee camps and those occupying private accommodations in large cities. We believe that the statuses that Syrians have in various receiving countries may prove to have important implications for the patterns of Syrian migration in the eventual post-war period. Based on signals from authorities in the host countries, and considering experiences from other post-conflict situations, we can anticipate how the above-mentioned statuses will evolve.

Drawing on experiences from Bosnia and other post-conflict societies, several assumptions can be made with regard to Syrian war migrations, encompassing features such as conversions of reception regimes and the future prospects of Syrian mobility in the eventual post-war period. At this point, it may be relevant to outline these experiences and trends:

39 For a more detailed description of return policies towards Bosnians, see Valenta & Strabac, 2013.

40 Approximately 30 per cent of Bosnian refugees were coerced to return, while the majority of a total of 1.2 million Bosnians were granted permanent residence status in the host countries.

41 In the post-war period, the political parties and local authorities that were involved in the ethnic cleansing and atrocities represented the obstacle for the return of refugees belonging to ethnic minorities. Consequently, minority returnees felt stigmatised and unsafe in these areas. Thus, many sold or exchanged their properties and resettled in parts of the Bosnia dominated by their own group.

- a. Temporary protection regimes may convert into coercive repatriation regimes.
- b. Temporary protection regimes sometimes transform into permanent protection regimes.
- c. Permanent protection regimes tend to focus on voluntary return programmes rather than on coercive repatriation of refugees.
- d. Uncertainty of status and living prospects in a receiving country may result in desirability of resettling in a third country.
- e. Refugees often choose to oppose coerced repatriation.
- f. After a long residence in exile, refugees may be reluctant to return, opting instead for alternative solutions, most notably for durable solutions such as local integration.
- g. Coercive repatriation regimes often result in large numbers of unsustainable returns.
- h. A termination of refugees' protection status and attempts of forced repatriation often result in secondary migrations and remigration of refugees.
- i. In the post-war period, emigration from the post-conflict society and transnational strategies proliferate.

Several of these and other trends will be discussed in more detail later in the article. It is at this point it is relevant to discuss whether these experiences may be applicable to post-war Syria. We believe that some parallels can be drawn. Based on these experiences, we can expect that most of those who got permanent protection in Europe and North America will never return to Syria even if they are offered generous repatriation assistance. We may also anticipate that many Syrians in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan will lose their temporary protection status, and that these host countries will coerce them to leave. As we will soon see, several other trends – reflected in the list above – are expected to affect Syrian refugees. However, we also argue that such analogies do come with certain limitations; it is surely possible to indicate several important dissimilarities, which may effectively lead to different migration outcomes.⁴²

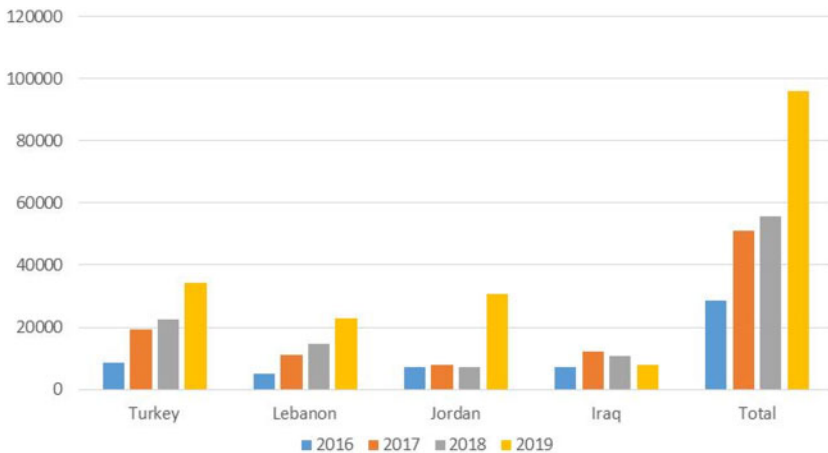
5.2. Repatriation of Syrian refugees and the other scenarios of future Syrian migrations

The repatriation of Syrian refugees has already started. According to the UNHCR, more than 230,000 Syrian refugees returned home from the neighbouring countries in the period 2016–2019.⁴³ Figure 5 shows spontaneous refugee returns from Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq in this period.

Projections are that many Syrians will return voluntarily in the near future, in particular in order to reunite with their families in Syria and to escape their protracted

42 For example, in the Syrian case, the host countries are, with the partial exception of Turkey, not signatories to the Refugee Convention. They have been reluctant hosts to millions of refugees, denying them permanent protection. In contrast, European countries and Bosnia's neighboring countries awarded a large share of Bosnian refugees with permanent residence and citizenship.

43 See https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions (last visited 10 March 2020).

Figure 5. Self-organised Syrian refugee returns to Syria.

refugee situation in refugee camps in neighbouring countries.⁴⁴ However, we cannot exclude the possibility that a large proportion of Syrian refugees risk being forced to return to their home country when the war eventually ends.⁴⁵ In line with the Bosnian case and previous repatriation regimes,⁴⁶ we can expect that the degree of coercion in the return policy will differ significantly among the host countries, and that some of these states will provide extensive repatriation assistance.

Furthermore, one important lesson from the attempts to repatriate refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Afghanistan and other war-ridden states is that return assistance (such as economic assistance and pay-to-go schemes) will not be sufficient to motivate most refugees to return. Likewise, we can surely expect that Syrians who have received permanent protection and residence in Western countries will prefer to stay. Most Bosnian refugees did so, and Syrians have been even longer in exile than Bosnians. The length of the time spent in exile, in addition to push factors in the home country, generally reduce the desire to return.⁴⁷

Yet, we anticipate that Syrians risk a higher degree of coercion than what Bosnians experienced in the post-war period. This would at least be the logical consequence of the reception regimes in the host countries. In contrast to the experience

44 See World Bank, 2019

45 This is in line with experiences from several post-war contexts, such as the returns of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan and the returns of refugees to Kosovo from several European countries. See Englbrecht, 2004; Monsutti, 2008; See K. Koser, *Transition, Crisis and Mobility in Afghanistan: Rhetoric and Reality*, Geneva, IOM, 2014

See also <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/SR268Fagen.pdf> (last visited 26 February 2019); see also http://www.artf.af/images/uploads/AFG_ILM_Background_Paper_2a_Online_-_Migration_Patterns_-_Macro.pdf (last visited 26 February 2019).

46 Englbrecht, 2004; Black and Gent, 2006; Monsutti, 2008; Valenta & Strabac, 2013.

47 This was also the case in other contexts. See D. Turton & P. Mardsen, *Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan*, Kabul: The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2002; See also Mesić and Bagić 2010.

of Bosnians, who in most cases obtained permanent residence in the host states, large receivers of Syrian refugees have generally shown scant willingness to grant Syrians permanent protection status.⁴⁸ Syrians in Germany and other host countries in Europe, who only have temporary residence and subsidiary protection, are anxious with regard to their status and forced returns.⁴⁹ Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan offer only temporary protection to Syrians, which produces similar concerns. Huge numbers of Syrians currently reside in these neighbouring states, which, in previous years, received large numbers of refugees from other countries as well. It seems that these host states do not want to repeat the earlier experiences they have had; for instance, those involving Palestinians resettling permanently in Jordan and Lebanon. Furthermore, Syria's neighbours have their own strategic, political and security concerns that may motivate them to forcibly return Syrian refugees. Although some attempts to integrate Syrian refugees have been done in Turkey, the focus on refugee return seems to prevail. Political elites in Turkey have repeatedly announced their plan to establish safe zones in North Syria to which Syrian refugees would eventually be returned.⁵⁰ Likewise, political factions in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq have their own political agendas and concerns.⁵¹ Finally, large numbers of refugees in Syria's near-abroad already lack legal residence permits and thus risk being arrested and deported. For example, in 2017 more than 70 per cent of Syrians aged 15 or above in Lebanon lacked resident permits.⁵² Against this background, we cannot exclude the possibility that the temporary protection granted to Syrians will gradually be converted into coercive repatriation regimes resulting in forced returns.⁵³

48 In the Bosnian case, temporary protection status was converted into permanent residence in most receiving countries. One large exception was Germany. German authorities started a large-scale return of Bosnians in the post-war period. Furthermore, most Bosnians in the two largest receiving neighbouring countries – Serbia and Croatia – were Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs. As co-ethnics, these people were entitled to permanent residence and citizenship in these receiving countries.

49 There are several examples of such conversion. As already noted, Germany ended their temporary protection regime after the war in Bosnia–Herzegovina ended, commencing instead on a return of Bosnians. After the 1999 war in Kosovo, temporary refugee protection was converted into coercive return in most European countries that had received refugees from Kosovo. See also <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/articles/2018/02/06/syrians-given-temporary-refuge-in-germany-fear-being-set-up-to-fail> (last visited 25 July 2019).

50 The return of Syrian refugees seems to be highly politicised. It is argued that the safe zones proposed by Turkey may also function as buffer zones against Kurdish factions in Northern Syria. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/24/erdogan-proposes-plan-for-refugee-safe-zone-in-syria> (last visited 2 October 2019); see also <https://www.irinnews.org/news-feature/2018/08/20/return-syrian-refugees-lebanon-hezbollah>; see also <https://www.voanews.com/a/syrian-refugees-russia-involvement/4537372.html> (last visited 26 February 2019); see also <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/11/syrias-neighbours-press-for-help-to-return-refugees> (last visited 26 June 2019); see <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/syria-safe-zone-long-term-problem-solution-190130081549394.html> (last visited 26 June 2019).

51 Several other concerns are addressed by the authorities in the host countries; *inter alia*, the economic and political burden the refugees represent. See <https://en.qantara.de/content/syrian-refugees-the-burden-of-hospitality>; <https://www.ft.com/content/f2106a88-72d6-11e7-aca6-c6bd07df1a3c> (last visited 26 February 2019). See <https://lobelog.com/the-future-of-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon/> (last visited 26 February 2019).

52 See <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/VASyR%202017.compressed.pdf> (last visited 25 July 2019).

53 See <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2018/08/20/return-syrian-refugees-lebanon-hezbollah> (last visited 25 July 2019);

5.3. Mobility as survival strategy in the post-conflict period

One general lesson from the repatriation of refugees to post-conflict societies is that no matter how much aid such states receive, more often than not they are unable to provide satisfactory conditions for a sustainable repatriation of refugees. For example, in the post-conflict period, Bosnia–Herzegovina was given the largest development and reconstruction aid in modern history.⁵⁴ In addition, a huge international peace-keeping force helped secure peace and stability in the country.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, a majority of international Bosnian refugees felt that the necessary preconditions for a sustainable return remained unfulfilled. Instead, as Bosnia failed to recover fully from the war, the post-war context itself produced new internal and international migrants.⁵⁶ Twenty years after the war ended, there were almost 100,000 IDPs in the country.⁵⁷ Furthermore, an estimated 1.6 million Bosnians are currently scattered all over the world, where they have permanently settled and established distinct diaspora communities.⁵⁸

The number of displaced Syrians is several times higher than the corresponding number of displaced Bosnians was in the 1990s. The Syrian war has also lasted longer, and the magnitude of the destruction is significantly larger than it was in Bosnia, which certainly will make reconstruction of Syria, and repatriation, even more challenging. Furthermore, there is still no peace plan in sight for Syria, and there is limited international support for rebuilding and reconstruction. In addition, the general insecurity prevailing in Syria, significant threats to returnees, the scope for forced conscription in the army, and the spectre of post-return detention and extra-judicial killings also deter Syrians from returning.⁵⁹

Security problems, challenges related to reconstruction of demolished domiciles and a lack of any prospects for a decent and stable income are often mentioned as major obstacles to a sustainable return of refugees in any post-war context. Experiences not only from Bosnia–Herzegovina, but also from other post-conflict societies – such as Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Croatia – remind us that large numbers

See also <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/08/world/middleeast/lebanon-syria-refugees-arsal.html> (last visited 25 July 2019).

54 It is estimated that Bosnia received seven billion dollars from 1996 to 2004, which is the largest ever per-capita financial assistance for reconstruction and development, see <https://wiiw.ac.at/financial-and-technical-assistance-in-the-reconstruction-and-development-of-post-conflict-bosnia-and-herzegovina-dlp-3229.pdf> (last visited 26 February 2019); see also <http://www.balkananalysis.com/bosnia/2011/06/21/bosnia%E2%80%99s-vast-foreign-financial-assistance-re-examined-statistics-and-results/> (last visited 26 February 2019).

55 In the post-war period, Bosnia–Herzegovina hosted tens of thousands of peacekeepers. The largest number of foreign peacekeeping forces (60,000) was deployed in the years 1995–1996.

56 *Bosnia Herzegovina Migration Profile for Year 2011*. [Online: Ministry of Security of Bosnia Herzegovina 2011, Sarajevo]. Available at: http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/iseljenistvo/Publikacije/Migration_Profile_EENG%202011.pdf (last visited 31 December 2018).

57 See <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/15810> (last visited 19 February 2019).

58 The estimate is provided by UN's Population Division database.

59 According to some studies, Syrian refugees who have not heeded calls to return and to register their homes, land and properties may have these expropriated, demolished, or resold. The difficult conditions inside Syria are also reflected in the deep social tensions and divisions that prevail, with a culture of fear, a lack of accountability and a history of forced disappearances and intimidation all serving as very strong disincentives to any voluntary return. See Mhaissen & Hodges, 2019; See also World Bank, 2019.

of refugees are reluctant to return for the above-mentioned reasons, opting instead for alternative solutions.⁶⁰ Based on these experiences, we expect that many Syrians would resist returning, attempting instead to stay in the host countries. Faced with the threat of deportation, many will try to convert their refugee status into other legal statuses, such as that of temporary labour migrants or permanent residence and citizenship through intermarriages with locals or fellow compatriots with residential status. Others will have no other opportunity than to live in the host state as overstayers and irregular migrants, whose protection or other legal statuses are cancelled or withdrawn.

Refugees in reception centres in Syria's neighbouring states will probably be the first to find themselves exposed to coercive repatriations to Syria. However, as already noted, most of these Syrians live at private addresses and are employed in the informal economy of these countries. We can expect that this group of people will oppose returning to Syria. Many have already gotten used to life as irregular migrants, and it will require enormous resources to locate, round up, and repatriate these people. Therefore, we may expect that large numbers of Syrians in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon – and in other countries in the region – will continue to live as irregular migrants.

Among those Syrians who will eventually return, we anticipate various forms of mobility – again based on knowledge from other post-conflict contexts.⁶¹ Indeed, one important lesson to be learned from the Bosnian and other post-war experiences is that coercive repatriation regimes result in large numbers of *unsustainable* returns; such migrations, in fact, tend to trigger new waves of internal and international migrations.⁶² Furthermore, the distinction between 'minority and majority returnee' experiences that emerged in many previous post-conflict countries will likely also become apparent in Syria.⁶³ That is, post-war migrations often result in ethnic homogenisation as IDPs and returnees mostly move to parts of the country that are controlled by their own group. It is already evident that many Syrians are very reluctant to return to parts of the country controlled by other factions than their own, which may result in new internal displacements as well as out-migrations, a scenario also seen in Bosnia.⁶⁴

Conforming to experiences from Bosnia–Herzegovina and other post-war societies, we can expect that the post-war migrations of Syrians will, in addition to return migrations and internal migrations, include a variety of transnational strategies, temporary labour migrations, seasonal, chain and circular migrations and other forms of mobility.⁶⁵ Yet, like most migrants from other post-conflict societies, a majority of Syrians

60 Englbrecht, 2004; Black & Gent, 2006; Monsutti, 2008; Mesić & Bagić, 2010; Valenta & Strabac, 2013.

61 Black & Gent, 2006; Monsutti, 2008; Valenta & Ramet, 2011

62 Englbrecht, 2004; Jenne 2010; Valenta & Strabac, 2013; Koser, 2014

63 Black, Eastmond & Gent, 2006; M. Eastmond, "Transnational Returns and Reconstruction in Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina," *International Migration*, 44(3), 2006, 143–160; E.K. Jenne, "Barriers to Reintegration after Ethnic Civil Wars: Lessons from Minority Returns and Restitution in the Balkans," *Civil Wars*, 12(4), 2010, 370–394; Mesić & Bagić, 2010

64 For example, it is already reported that many Syrian refugees are reluctant to move to areas controlled by the Assad regime. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/30/we-cant-go-back-syrias-refugees-fear-for-their-future-after-war> (last visited 26 February 2019); <https://openmigration.org/en/analyses/syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-still-reluctant-to-go-home/> (last visited 26 February 2019).

65 Al-Ali; Black & Koser, 2001; D. Sriskandarajah, "The Migration–Development Nexus: Sri Lanka Case Study," *International Migration*, 40(5), 2002, 283–307; Monsutti, 2008; Koser, 2014

will have few legal opportunities to (re)migrate. Even so, a substantial share of the refugees from the Yugoslav Wars were in periods an exception to this general trend. For example, the US provided legal permanent residence status to more than 100,000 Bosnians in the post-war period. Similarly, Australia increased its annual refugee and humanitarian intake to resettle a larger number of Bosnians during the late 1990s. Political elites in Serbia and Croatia also provided permanent residence to hundreds of thousands of their co-ethnics who fled wars in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Croatia.⁶⁶

It is highly unlikely that Syrians will face an equal variety of opportunities for legal and permanent resettlement. The US has a much more restrictive stance on the admittance of Syrian refugees than they had in the case of Bosnia.⁶⁷ Most Syrian refugees in the US have come from Syria's neighbouring countries via the UNHCR's resettlement programme, but in recent years, US authorities have been reluctant to take in Syrians. [Figure 6](#) shows developments in resettlements of Syrians to the US and other 'large' countries of resettlement.

As we can see, few Syrians migrate via the UNHCR, and the numbers of resettlements are in decline. In the period of 2011–2018, some 600,000 refugees were resettled via the UNHCR refugee resettlement programmes; however, just a fraction of them were Syrians. In total, 120,000 Syrians migrated from Syria's neighbouring countries via such programmes (in the period 2011–2018). The number of resettlements reached its peak in 2016, with almost 50,000 resettled people. In the years that followed, numbers of resettlements have drastically declined. In 2018, only 23,000 Syrians were resettled this way. Most of these people were resettled in North America and Europe, while other relatively large receivers of resettled refugees, such as Australia, have received very few Syrian refugees in recent years.⁶⁸ Therefore, for millions of Syrians who have temporary protection in neighbouring countries, the UNHCR resettlement programme does not represent a real option for permanent protection and residence.

Furthermore, Syria's neighbouring countries do not offer pathways to permanent residence and citizenship that are in any way equivalent to those that Croatia and Serbia provided to Bosnian Croats and Serbs, respectively. For example, there are almost 3.5 million Syrians in Turkey, but only 50,000 of them have obtained Turkish citizenship.⁶⁹ Thus, here as well we can draw a parallel to Afghan, Lebanese, Somali or North and South Sudanese post-conflict migrations, which relied substantially on transnational strategies, irregular migrations to neighbouring countries and temporary labour migrations to the countries in the Persian/Arab Gulf.⁷⁰ This would, in fact, be the most likely scenario with regard to out-migrations in post-conflict Syria.

66 Furthermore, with the admission of Croatia in the EU, many Bosnian Croats got an opportunity to migrate and to obtain temporary or permanent residence in various EU countries.

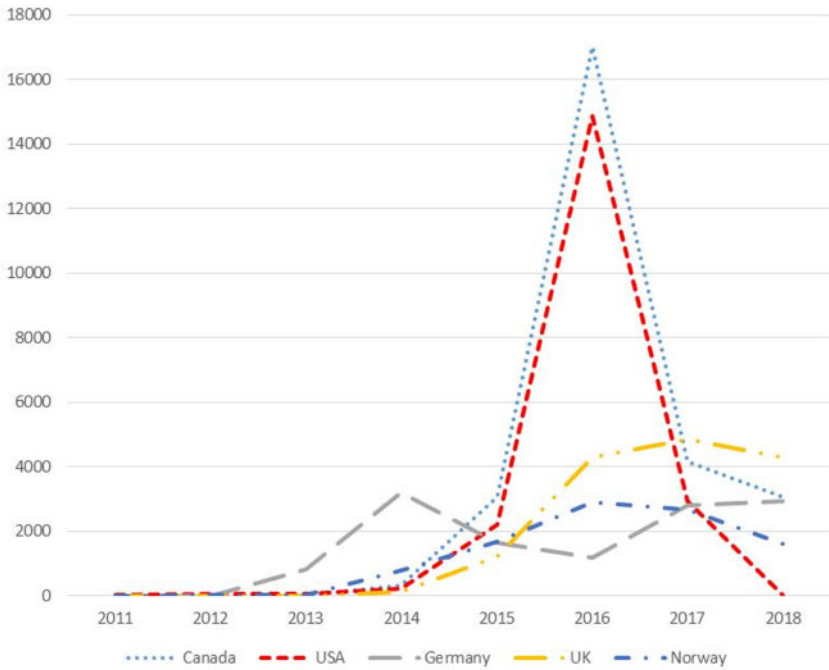
67 Therefore, it may be more relevant to draw a parallel to Afghan, Somali or North Sudanese post-conflict migrations; these involved a substantial amount of irregular migrations to neighbouring countries and temporary labour migrations to the countries in the Persian/Arab Gulf.

68 According to UNHCR's statistics, Australia has received about 50,000 resettled refugees in period 2011–2019, but only 2,700 of them were Syrians. Most of Syrians were resettled before 2017. Similarly, Australia's tough policy on asylum seekers, involving mandatory offshore detention, has limited the number of Syrians obtaining a refugee status and resettling in this country.

69 See <https://sirajsy.net/en/investigations/what-backgrounds-of-granting-nationality-to-tens-thousands-of-syrian-in-turkey/> (last visited 25 July 2019).

70 Hourani & Sansening-Dabbous, 2007; Valenta and Jakobsen, 2017

Figure 6. UNHCR Resettlement of Syrians to the five largest receivers (2011–2018).



A widespread pattern of out-migrations from post-conflict societies is the continuation of migrations to the countries that were large host states during the conflict.⁷¹ Syrians in Western countries will probably sponsor at least some of their family members left in Syria or other countries to join them in the places of their settlement. It is not hard to imagine that some would be able to stay or to come through the system of private sponsorship, like in the Canadian case.⁷² Yet, one major option left to Syrians would be to migrate to states in the region via irregular labour migration channels. Another option is offered by regular, temporary labour migration regimes in the region. The scale of temporary labour migrations will depend significantly on the stance taken by the neighbouring countries. The reestablishment of migration pathways and policies that existed before the conflict will be an important precondition for such migration pathways. Agreements on circular migrations between Syria, Lebanon and Jordan that existed before the war were suspended after hostilities broke out due to the mass influx of Syrian refugees.⁷³ Syrians may therefore hope that the bilateral migration agreements with neighbouring countries will be re-established and that large receivers of temporary labour migrants in the region will

71 Monsutti, 2008; Valenta & Strabac, 2013; Valenta and Jakobsen, 2018

72 See <http://www.rstp.ca/en/refugee-sponsorship/the-private-sponsorship-of-refugees-program/> (last visited 12 August 2019).

73 K. Dorai, "Conflict and Migration in the Middle East: Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon", in M. Karakoulaki, L. Southgate & J. Steiner (ed.) *Critical Perspectives on Migration in the Twenty-First Century*. Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing, 2018.

be more open to accept Syrian labour migrants in the post-war period than they had been during the war. If this happens, we can expect a significant increase in the numbers of Syrian labour migrants in the Gulf – and in other states in the region.

6. CONCLUSION

This article has focused on the shifting legal statuses of Syrian refugees in several countries. Our ambition has been two-fold. First, we have sought to explore the nexus of migrations, migrant statuses and reception regimes. Secondly, we have discussed the expected future patterns of Syrian mobility. Based on the experiences from other post-conflict situations, such as Bosnia, several possible future scenarios of Syrian migrations have been discussed and outlined.

With regard to the conceptualisation of Syrian migrations, we have developed and nuanced the typology of migrations of Syrians, and we have identified varieties of the status changes. It is maintained that migration trends, asylum policies and the positioning of the Syrian migrants are dynamic, multi-layered and highly interconnected, resulting in transitions in statuses and changing motivations for migration. Here, we have argued that the transitions in refugees' statuses and the secondary migrations happen in the nexus of social structure and human agency. Indeed, the dynamic of Syrian migration is shaped by the interaction between the specific migration policies and the context of reception – and the refugees' responses to these structures. For example, Syrians who escaped the war and moved to neighbouring countries later tried to flee the inadequate conditions and the protracted refugee situations they faced in their host state. The above-mentioned structures allowed in periods swift secondary movements that evolved into large-scale transit migrations. However, some of the transit migrants become instead stranded migrants due to the various policy restrictions in place. Due to the changes in policies, refugees later engaged in fragmented migrations characterised by long-term residence in various host countries.

With respect to future prospects, we have discussed how certain categories of Syrians may adjust in the post-war period, whenever that period commences. We have outlined possible transitions in statuses and reception regimes. The largest concern here are transitions from temporary protection statuses into statuses of irregular migrants followed by deportations and unsustainable returns. The transformations of receiving states' reception regimes into specific repatriation regimes, in combination with refugees' reactions to transitions in statuses, may result in new forms of mobility. Here, we can expect that return migrations and status changes will unfold in parallel with complex internal migrations and secondary migrations.⁷⁴ It is patently clear that when Syria eventually emerges from the war, it will do so as a broken country, impoverished by the conflict, politically unstable and generally unsafe. Lessons from other post-conflict societies indicate that these grim realities on the ground will undermine preconditions for a safe and sustainable return. No matter how extensive the international aid Syria receives, we can expect that many Syrian refugees will oppose returning from their host countries. Among these people, we await to find those who will try to stay in receiving countries as irregular migrants, but also those who

74 See Monsutti, 2008; See Hourani & Sansening-Dabbous, 2007; Valenta & Jakobsen, 2017.

will manage to convert their refugee status into other legal statuses, as well as those who will migrate to third countries, as happened with Bosnian refugees in the 1990s. Indeed, a general lesson that could be drawn from other war-torn countries – such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sri Lanka, Croatia, Afghanistan, Sudan and Lebanon – is that mobility becomes a key livelihood strategy in post-conflict contexts. As Black and Gent point out, ‘continued mobility after an initial return – including circulation and the development of a “transnational” lifestyle – may be more “sustainable” than a single and definitive return to the refugee’s place of origin’.⁷⁵ It is against this background that we expect that, for many Syrians, the ability to migrate and work in other countries will, at least in periods, be an important family-survival strategy. Experiences from post-war contexts can be of significant political relevance, as they may contribute to preparing host countries, local receiving communities in Syria and the relevant local NGOs and international organisations. The previous cases of large-scale returns make us cognisant of the human costs of such forced migrations. They also teach us about the preconditions for the sustainability of such returns. Furthermore, they remind us that various forms of return support and pay-to-go schemes have relatively weak effects on sustainable refugee returns. Finally, they instruct us that the post-war period will create new needs for out-migrations, which preferably should be managed through the legal channels for migration, such as various resettlement opportunities, visa-free regimes and circular and labour migration agreements with the countries in the region.

75 Black & Gent, 2006, 15.