

# THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS, TEN YEARS LATER: HOW THE UNITED STATES CAN IMPROVE ITS RESPONSE

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## I. INTRODUCTION

March 2021 marked the tenth year of the Syrian civil war and the resulting Syrian refugee crisis. With an estimated 6.6 million refugees and 6.7 million internally displaced persons,<sup>1</sup> Syrians constitute the largest forcibly displaced population globally.<sup>2</sup> Syria's neighboring countries have opened their borders to millions of refugees,<sup>3</sup> donor organizations and countries have pledged billions for the Syrian crisis,<sup>4</sup> and civil society organizations have responded by delivering various resources.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, there is still a funding gap in addressing the crisis and providing social and economic resources.<sup>6</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic further widened this gap and added challenges for

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1. *Syria Refugee Crisis Explained*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR REFUGEES, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/> (last visited Dec. 8, 2020).

2. As of the end of 2019. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR REFUGEES 9 (June 9, 2020), <https://www.unhcr.org/5ee200e37.pdf>.

3. There are approximately 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees in Turkey, 880,000 registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and 660,000 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan—the top three hosting countries for Syrian refugees. *Durable Solutions Dashboard, September 2020*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR REFUGEES 1 (Nov. 17, 2020), <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/83045>.

4. See *Co-chairs' Statement Annex: Fundraising*, EUROPEAN COUNCIL (June 2020), [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44789/syria-conference-statement-annex-2020-pledging-statement\\_30062020.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44789/syria-conference-statement-annex-2020-pledging-statement_30062020.pdf).

5. See, e.g., *Syria: How does the IRC help in Syria?*, INT'L RESCUE COMM., <https://www.rescue.org/country/syria#how-does-the-irc-help-in-syria> (last visited Jan. 24, 2020); *Syrian Refugee Crisis*, CARE, <https://care.org/our-work/disaster-response/emergencies/syrian-refugee-crisis/> (last visited Jan. 3, 2020).

6. See Rima Cheri & Houssam Hariri, *Funding gap threatens more misery for destitute Syrians*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR REFUGEES (April 23, 2018), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2018/4/5adddd154/funding-gap-threatens-misery-destitute-syrians.html> (noting a funding gap in providing cash assistance for families); *After 9 years of tragedy, resilience and solidarity, the world must not forget displaced Syrians*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR REFUGEES (March 10, 2020), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2020/3/5e67ade92d6/9-years-tragedy-resilience-solidarity-world-must-forget-displaced-syrians.html> (“The gap between actual needs and available resources is widening by the day. Lack of aid, limited access to health services and education increase daily costs and risk pushing refugee families into an irreversible spiral of vulnerability.”); Billy Briggs, *Funding gap means cuts to education programmes for Syrian refugees in Jordan*, THEIRWORLD (Sept. 20, 2018), <https://theirworld.org/news/funding-gap-hits-education-services-syrian-refugees-jordan>.

many refugees.<sup>7</sup> The pandemic exacerbated refugees' vulnerabilities, including a lack of legal protections and economic opportunities.<sup>8</sup> Overall livelihood conditions have seriously deteriorated. For example, the World Food Programme reported about nine out of ten Syrian refugee families in Lebanon—home to the highest number of displaced per capita<sup>9</sup>—now live in extreme poverty.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, COVID-19 has delayed refugee resettlement globally,<sup>11</sup> and as a result, 2020 marked a record low for resettlement.<sup>12</sup>

As the Syrian refugee crisis entered its tenth year, the United States installed Joseph Biden as president, ushering in a new administration with the opportunity to change U.S. refugee and foreign policy. Though the Biden administration may have limited capabilities and power to vastly improve the U.S.' general policy towards Syria,<sup>13</sup> there are measures that this Administration can take to provide a more collective and enhanced response to the Syrian refugee crisis. This piece will broadly examine the status of Syrian refugees worldwide, how the new Biden administration has already improved its policies towards Syrian refugees, and how it can further enhance the U.S.' response.

## II. HOW STATES HAVE RESPONDED TO THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

The Syrian refugee crisis began in 2011 with the onset of the Syrian war but garnered more media attention in English-language news sources around 2015 once the refugee flow began to reach European borders at increasing rates.<sup>14</sup> The image of three-year-old refugee Alan Kurdi lying dead on Turkey's shores, who drowned as part of an effort to reach Greece, drew

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7. See *Enhanced support for Syria refugees vital amid COVID-19 pandemic – UNHCR chief*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR REFUGEES (June 30, 2020), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2020/6/5efb5c754/enhanced-support-syria-refugees-vital-amid-covid-19-pandemic-unhcr-chief.html>.

8. See *Impact of COVID-19 on Syrian refugees and host communities in Jordan and Lebanon*, INT'L LAB. ORG. (2020), <https://perma.cc/UA54-RTEW>; *Syrian refugees profoundly hit by COVID-19 economic downturn*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR REFUGEES (June 16, 2020), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2020/6/5ee884fb4/syrian-refugees-profoundly-hit-covid-19-economic-downturn.html>.

9. *Regional Strategic Overview: 2020–2021*, 3RP SYRIA 26 (Dec. 2020), <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/RSO2021.pdf>.

10. *Nine out of ten Syrian refugee families in Lebanon are now living in extreme poverty*, UN study says, WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (Dec. 18, 2020), <https://www.wfp.org/news/nine-out-ten-syrian-refugee-families-lebanon-are-now-living-extreme-poverty-un-study-says>.

11. *UNHCR warns 2020 risks lowest resettlement levels in recent history*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR REFUGEES (Nov. 19, 2020), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2020/11/5fb4e6f24/unhcr-warns-2020-risks-lowest-resettlement-levels-recent-history.html>.

12. *Refugee resettlement numbers fall to lowest in two decades: UNHCR*, UN NEWS (Nov. 19, 2020), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/11/1078052>.

13. See Abdulrahman al-Masri, *Limited and constrained: The Biden administration and the prospects of a Syria policy*, ATLANTIC COUNCIL (Dec. 3, 2020), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/penasource/limited-and-constrained-the-biden-administration-and-the-prospects-of-a-syria-policy/>.

14. See Katty Alhayek, *Syrian Refugees in the Media*, MIDDLE E. REP. No. 278 (Spring 2016), <https://merip.org/2016/04/syrian-refugees-in-the-media/>.

international attention and greater public empathy for the refugee crisis.<sup>15</sup> As a result, former U.S. President Barack Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced plans to resettle Syrian refugees, and the European Union approved a plan to accept refugees.<sup>16</sup> However, the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris hindered the global refugee response,<sup>17</sup> as certain groups feared that admitting refugees would lead to terrorist attacks.<sup>18</sup> Though the Western media focuses more on the migrant crisis in the European Union, Syria's neighboring countries have been at the forefront of accepting refugees.<sup>19</sup>

Most Syrian refugees live in the Middle East and North Africa region, specifically in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt.<sup>20</sup> However, the externally displaced Syrians living in these countries do not enjoy the full international legal protections of being a "refugee." While the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Refugee Convention) and its 1967 Protocol call for various international legal protections for refugees, such as public education and access to courts,<sup>21</sup> implementation of these protections is rather difficult. First, of these countries, only Egypt and Turkey are legally bound to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Turkey implemented a geographic limitation when they ratified the Refugee Convention, limiting its application to refugees fleeing from Europe only.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it is not required to apply these protections for its Syrian refugee

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15. Rebecca Adler-Nissen, Katrine Emilie Andersen & Lene Hansen, *Images, emotions, and international politics: the death of Alan Kurdi*, REVIEW OF INT'L STUD. (Oct. 18, 2019), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/review-of-international-studies/article/images-emotions-and-international-politics-the-death-of-alan-kurdi/0E58366AEDE24E063EA4AC34D398C692>.

16. *Id.*

17. *Id.* See also Tajha Chappellet-Lanier, *What's Next for Migrants After Paris?*, THE ATLANTIC (Nov. 14, 2015), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/11/migrant-crisis-paris-attacks/416067/>.

18. For example, following the 2015 attacks in Paris, ". . . 31 U.S. governors issued statements opposing the resettlement of Syrian refugees in their states. Several states initiated legal challenges to the placement of Syrians; none have prevailed to date and voluntary organizations working with the U.S. government continue to resettle refugees across the United States." Jie Zong & Jeanne Batalova, *Syrian Refugees in the United States*, MIGRATION POL'Y INST. (Jan. 12, 2017), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/syrian-refugees-united-states-2017>.

19. Kemal Kirişçi & Elizabeth Ferris, *Not Likely to Go Home: Syrian Refugees and the Challenges to Turkey—and the International Community*, BROOKINGS INST. 14 (Sept. 2015), <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Turkey-Policy-Paper-web.pdf>.

20. *Syria Refugee Crisis*, USA FOR UNHCR, <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria/> (last visited Jan. 3, 2021); see also Phillip Connor, *Most displaced Syrians are in the Middle East, and about a million are in Europe*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (Jan. 29, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/29/where-displaced-syrians-have-resettled/>.

21. See Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, July 28, 1951, arts. 16, 22, 19 U.S.T. 6259, 189 U.N.T.S. 150, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/3b66c2aa10>.

22. *States Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR REFUGEES 2–4 (Apr. 2015), <https://www.unhcr.org/protect/protection/3b73b0d63.pdf>.

23. *Turkey's Asylum Law and Policies*, HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG 6 (Dec. 2019), <https://tr.boell.org/en/2019/12/11/turkeys-asylum-law-and-policies>; *Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report – Universal Periodic Review: The Republic of Turkey*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR REFUGEES 1 (June 2014), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5541e6694.html>.

population.<sup>24</sup> Second, applying these obligations is challenging when addressing a mass influx of refugees due to a host country's lack of resources<sup>25</sup> and its own political interests in not having refugees settle permanently.<sup>26</sup> Third, Syrian refugees face discrimination in these host countries. For instance, public support for refugees has declined as Turkish citizens have expressed concern regarding future life with Syrian refugees,<sup>27</sup> and there have been attacks towards refugee communities in Lebanon.<sup>28</sup>

Though the vast majority of Syrian refugees remained geographically close to Syria, refugees have also fled to other areas, including Europe and North America. Approximately one million displaced Syrians moved to Europe,<sup>29</sup> with Germany and Sweden being home to the largest group of Syrian refugees in the region—about 572,800 and 113,400 refugees as of the end of 2019, respectively.<sup>30</sup> Similar to refugees fleeing to Syria's neighboring countries, many refugees reaching European borders face serious human rights risks and violations.<sup>31</sup> The U.S. has had a smaller response in terms of admitting refugees, as it accepted a total of about 22,138 Syrian refugees in the 2011-2020 fiscal years.<sup>32</sup> Initially, the Obama administration did not accept a large number of Syrian refugees, but they increased the quota towards the end of their second Administration term.<sup>33</sup> The U.S. admitted around 12,587 Syrian refugees in the 2016 fiscal year (October 2015 to September 2016), a stark 648% increase from the 1,682 Syrian refugees admitted during the prior fiscal year.<sup>34</sup> But, the 2016

24. *Turkey's Asylum Law and Policies*, *supra* note 23, at 6.

25. See Sarah Bidinger, Aaron Lang, Danielle Hites, Yoana Kuzmova, Elena Noureddine, & Susan M. Akram, *Protecting Syrian Refugees: Laws, Policies, and Global Responsibility Sharing*, BOSTON U. INT'L HUM. RTS. CLINIC 1 (Aug. 2015), <https://www.bu.edu/law/files/2015/08/syrianrefugees.pdf>.

26. See *e.g.*, *id.* at 28–30 (noting Lebanon's political interests and perspective towards refugees), 55–56 (addressing how Jordan does not permit permanent integration of refugees).

27. Suat Kinkilöğlu, *Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Changing Attitudes and Fortunes*, STIFTUNG WISSENSCHAFT UND POLITIK (Feb. 2020), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2020C05/>.

28. See, *e.g.*, Marwan Issa, *More than 100 tents set on fire in Miniyeh refugee camp*, BEIRUT TODAY (Dec. 28, 2020), <https://beirut-today.com/2020/12/28/more-than-100-tents-set-on-fire-in-miniyeh-refugee-camp/>; Anchal Vohra, *Lebanon's Deir al-Ahmar: How an incident displaced 600 refugees*, AL JAZEERA (June 9, 2019), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/6/9/lebanons-deir-al-ahmar-how-an-incident-displaced-600-refugees>.

29. Connor, *supra* note 20; Ernesto F. L. Amaral, Mahlet Atakilt Woldetsadik & Gabriela Armenta, *Europe's Great Challenge: Integrating Syrian Refugees*, RAND (April 20, 2019), <https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/04/europes-great-challenge-integrating-syrian-refugees.html>.

30. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019*, *supra* note 2, at 20.

31. See, *e.g.*, *Hungary: Migrants Abused at the Border*, HUM. RTS. WATCH (July 13, 2016), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/13/hungary-migrants-abused-border>; Joanna Kakissis, *'Europe Does Not See Us As Human': Stranded Refugees Struggle In Greece*, NPR (March 9, 2018), <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/03/09/589973165/europe-does-not-see-us-as-human-stranded-refugees-struggle-in-greece>; Alicia Medina, *Syrian NGO seeks a first before the ICC: Individual criminal liability for Greece's abuses against refugees*, SYRIA DIRECT (Feb. 7, 2021), <https://syriadirect.org/syrian-ngo-seeks-a-first-before-the-icc-individual-criminal-liability-for-greeces-abuses-against-refugees-2/>.

32. 29 refugees from Syria were admitted in the FY (fiscal year) 2011; 31 in FY 2012; 36 in FY 2013; 105 in FY 2014; 1,682 in FY 2015; 12,587 in FY 2016; 6,557 in FY 2017; 67 in FY 2018; 563 in FY 2019; and 481 in FY 2020. Data extracted from *Admissions & Arrivals: Refugee Admissions Report*, U.S. DEPT. OF STATE REFUGEE PROCESSING CTR., <https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/> (last updated Nov. 30, 2020).

33. See *id.* A total of 29 refugees were admitted in the FY 2012, whereas 12,587 were admitted in FY 2016.

34. See *Admissions & Arrivals: Refugee Admissions Report*, *supra* note 32.

presidential election of Donald Trump hindered advancement for refugee rights and resettlement in the United States.

### III. HOW THE NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION CAN IMPROVE ITS POLICIES

The previous U.S. Administration had counterproductive policies that disadvantaged refugees. Under the pretext of national security, the Trump administration embraced demeaning rhetoric towards refugee communities. A 2016 Trump campaign advertisement compared Syrian refugees to a “bowl of [S]kittles,” stating, “If I had a bowl of [S]kittles and I told you three would kill you. Would you take a handful? That’s our Syrian refugee problem.”<sup>35</sup> More recently, in the 2020 election, Trump equated refugees to “radical Islamic terrorists,” tweeting that Biden “would increase refugees from terrorist nations by 700%” and turn “the entire Midwest into a refugee camp.”<sup>36</sup> These anti-refugee sentiments degraded and demonized individuals who endured and fled from violence. While the U.S. is justified in protecting its national security interests, such rhetoric increases false and negative stereotypes of individuals from Muslim-majority and/or Arab countries. Furthermore, this rhetoric exaggerated and provoked false notions of the threat of refugees, as “the chances of being murdered by a refugee-related terrorist attack in the United States has been 1 in 3.4 billion a year.”<sup>37</sup>

The Trump administration’s rhetoric translated into policies that harmed refugees and asylum seekers—both Syrian and non-Syrian.<sup>38</sup> Trump enforced the Muslim ban, an executive order that imposed travel bans on individuals from Muslim-majority countries—including Syria—and affected refugee flows.<sup>39</sup> Under the Trump administration, the U.S. fell to its lowest record for

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35. *Donald Trump Jr compares Syrian refugees to Skittles*, BBC NEWS (Sept. 20, 2016), <https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-37416457>.

36. @realDonaldTrump, TWITTER (Nov. 2, 2020, 4:40 PM), <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1323424836077670400>.

37. Jessica Brandt & Robert L. McKenzie, *Addressing the Syrian refugee crisis*, BROOKINGS INST. (Dec. 16, 2016), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/addressing-the-syrian-refugee-crisis-recommendations-for-the-next-administration/>.

38. See Sarah Arnold & Melinda Frimpong, *Tracking Joe Biden’s plans for refugees, asylum seekers and COVID-19*, INT’L RESCUE COMM. (Nov. 20, 2020), <https://www.rescue.org/article/tracking-joe-bidens-plans-refugees-asylum-seekers-and-covid-19>. The Trump administration engaged in various other decisions that impacted refugees and asylum seekers worldwide. For example, the Trump administration cut the U.S.’ \$365 million annual contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Dalal Yassine, *Ending Trump’s war on refugees*, MIDDLE E. INST. (Nov. 27, 2020), <https://www.mei.edu/publications/ending-trumps-war-refugees>. The Trump administration also imposed a rule that created “insurmountable procedural barriers, evidentiary burdens, and qualification standards” for groups including Central Americans fleeing violence. Bill Frelick, *The Trump Administration’s Final Insult and Injury to Refugees*, HUM. RTS. WATCH (Dec. 11, 2020), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/11/trump-administrations-final-insult-and-injury-refugees>.

39. The Muslim ban is also known as the “Travel ban.” The final version of the Muslim ban created an exception for admission of refugees. Section 6(e), Proclamation No. 9645, 82 Fed. Reg. 186,451,611 (Sept. 24, 2017). However, the first version of the ban banned Syrian refugees indefinitely and the second version of the ban suspended the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days. *Debunking “Extreme Vetting”: Recommendations to Build Back the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program*, INT’L REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROJECT 17 (Oct. 2020), <https://refugeerights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Vetting-Report-2020.pdf>.



admitting refugees since the resettlement program began in 1980.<sup>40</sup> The average annual refugee resettlement number for both Republican and Democratic administrations is 95,000.<sup>41</sup> However, the Trump administration stated it would only accept 18,000 refugees for the 2020 Fiscal year.<sup>42</sup> This number was further reduced with the onset of COVID-19 as only 10,800 refugees were resettled in the United States in 2020<sup>43</sup>—481 of which were Syrian.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the Trump administration implemented extreme vetting procedures to screen refugees but “provided no evidence that any of these measures were actually justified on security grounds.”<sup>45</sup> This ultimately created further delays for refugees, many of whom live and wait in dangerous situations through their refugee application process.<sup>46</sup>

The new Biden administration marked a positive shift in policies towards Syrian refugees, and the Administration should continue on this upward trajectory. Biden revoked the Muslim ban on his first day in office,<sup>47</sup> indicating a step towards assisting impacted families.<sup>48</sup> Secretary of State Antony Blinken publicly recognized the U.S.’ failure in its policy towards Syria, including preventing the large flows of internally displaced persons and refugees.<sup>49</sup> Biden has committed to raising refugee resettlement to 125,000 annually<sup>50</sup>—an increase from Trump’s low record of resettlement. Resettlement is one of the key ways that the Biden administration can advance the U.S.’ position in global responsibility.<sup>51</sup> By increasing the cap, the new Administration offers more opportunities for Syrians to resettle. There are complementary pathways to admission on top of resettlement, such as humanitarian visas and family reunification.<sup>52</sup> One

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40. Katie Zezima, *The U.S. has slashed its refugee intake. Syrians fleeing war are most affected*, WASH. POST (May 7, 2019), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/the-us-has-slashed-its-refugee-intake-syrians-fleeing-war-are-most-affected/2019/05/07/f764e57c-678f-11e9-a1b6-b29b90ef-a879\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/the-us-has-slashed-its-refugee-intake-syrians-fleeing-war-are-most-affected/2019/05/07/f764e57c-678f-11e9-a1b6-b29b90ef-a879_story.html).

41. Arnold & Frimpong, *supra* note 38, at 2.

42. Yassine, *supra* note 38, at 3.

43. *Id.*

44. *See Admissions & Arrivals: Refugee Admissions Report*, *supra* note 32.

45. *Debunking “Extreme Vetting,” supra* note 39, at 17; *see also* Deborah Amos, *Biden Plans To Reopen America To Refugees After Trump Slashed Admissions*, NPR (Nov. 11, 2020), <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/11/933500132/biden-plans-to-reopen-america-to-refugees-after-trump-slashed-admissions>.

46. *See Debunking “Extreme Vetting,” supra* note 39, at 30.

47. *Proclamation on Ending Discriminatory Bans on Entry to The United States*, WHITE HOUSE (Jan. 20, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/proclamation-ending-discriminatory-bans-on-entry-to-the-united-states/>; David Leonhardt, *Biden’s First Day And what else you need to know today*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 21, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/21/briefing/executive-orders-biden-climate-proud-boys.html>.

48. *See Press Release: IRAP Applauds Executive Order Rescinding Muslim and African Bans*, INT’L REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROJECT (Jan. 21, 2021), <https://refugeerights.org/press-release-irap-applauds-executive-order-rescinding-muslim-and-african-bans/> (“This order is an important first step in righting the wrongs of the previous administration’s immigration policies.”).

49. Al-Masri, *supra* note 13.

50. *See, e.g.,* Arnold & Frimpong, *supra* note 38; Yassine, *supra* note 38; Amos, *supra* note 45.

51. *See Global Responsibility Sharing through Pathways for Admission of Syrian Refugees*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM’R FOR REFUGEES (March 2016), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/588b4ddf4.html>.

52. *Complementary Pathways for Admission of Refugees to Third Countries: Key Considerations*, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM’R FOR REFUGEES: DIV. OF INT’L PROT. 5 (Apr. 2019), <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5cebf3fc4.pdf>.

program for Syrian refugees in the U.S. is Priority-2 (P-2) Direct Access Program (DAP), which allows both Syrian and Iraqi beneficiaries of I-130 Petition for Alien Relative to apply for refugee resettlement.<sup>53</sup> The Biden administration should continue to ensure the P-2 DAP program is available for Syrian beneficiaries.

In addition to bolstering resettlement numbers and other admission pathways, the U.S. should continue to provide aid. The U.S. has remained the largest financial supporter of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),<sup>54</sup> but the UNHCR has appealed for further support for the main host countries in the Middle East region.<sup>55</sup> Donor countries should increase their support to countries such as Lebanon and Jordan—countries with high refugee populations negatively impacted by COVID-19.<sup>56</sup> Though COVID-19 has also placed financial burdens on the United States, providing additional support can combat the increased vulnerabilities refugees face and encourage continued global support for the protracted crisis.

The prolonged Syrian refugee crisis indicates that more long-term approaches for refugee crises are needed.<sup>57</sup> Though there is talk of refugee return to Syria,<sup>58</sup> current conditions in Syria do not permit a “safe, voluntary, and dignified” return for many and make it even impossible for some due to factors such as political persecution and forced military conscription.<sup>59</sup> The Syrian government held a conference in November 2020, calling on its six million refugees to return to Syria.<sup>60</sup> However, most refugees will not return if the current president stays in power because of their fear and lack of trust in the regime, among other concerns.<sup>61</sup> Thus, key resettlement and donor states, such as the United States, should continue to improve their response to the Syrian refugee crisis. It will take time to rebuild the refugee and asylum

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53. *U.S. Refugee Resettlement Processing for Iraqi and Syrian Beneficiaries of an Approved I-130 Petition—Frequently Asked Questions*, U.S. DEPT. OF STATE (Mar. 11, 2016), <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2016/254649.htm>.

54. Yassine, *supra* note 38, at 5.

55. *Syrian refugees profoundly hit by COVID-19 economic downturn*, *supra* note 8, at 3.

56. Misty Buswell, *How job opportunities for Syrian refugees could drive economic growth in Jordan and Lebanon*, WORLD ECON. F. (June 29, 2020), <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/syrian-refugees-jordan-lebanon-employment/>.

57. See, e.g., Kristy Siegfried, *Shifting to the Long Term*, NEW HUMANITARIAN (May 20, 2016), <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2016/05/20/shifting-long-term>; Laura Batalla & Juliette Toly, *Toward Long-Term Solidarity with Syrian Refugees? Turkey's Policy Response and Challenges*, ATLANTIC COUNCIL (Aug. 2018), [https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Toward\\_Long-Term\\_Solidarity\\_with\\_Syrian\\_Refugees\\_web\\_final\\_update\\_101118.pdf](https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Toward_Long-Term_Solidarity_with_Syrian_Refugees_web_final_update_101118.pdf).

58. See Diana Rayes and Suhail al-Ghazi, *Part 2: Detrimental Conditions inside Syria*, TAHIR INST. FOR MIDDLE E. POL'Y (Dec. 14, 2020), <https://timep.org/explainers/part-2-detrimental-conditions-inside-syria/>.

59. Diana Rayes & Suhail al-Ghazi, *Part 3: Policy Recommendations for the Return of Syrian Refugees*, TAHIR INST. FOR MIDDLE E. POL'Y (Dec. 14, 2020), <https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/part-3-policy-recommendations-for-the-return-of-syrian-refugees/>.

60. Ben Hubbard, *Syria Seeks Return of Refugees, but They Fear Leader's Wrath*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 12, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/12/world/middleeast/12syria-refugees-assad.html>.

61. See *id.*

system that was harmed by the Trump administration.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, new policies could offer greater hope for refugees worldwide<sup>63</sup> and send a message that the United States is committed to enhancing its response to these types of crises.

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62. Amos, *supra* note 45.

63. Yassine, *supra* note 38.