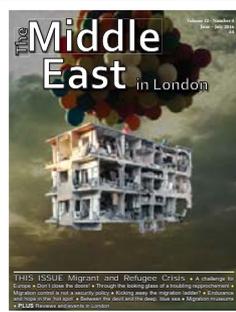


The Middle East in London

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THIS ISSUE: Migrant and Refugee Crisis • A challenge for Europe
• Don't close the doors! • Through the looking glass of a troubling rapprochement • Migration control is not a security policy • Kicking away the migration ladder? • Endurance and hope in the 'hot spot' • Between the devil and the deep, blue sea • Migration museums • **PLUS** Reviews and events in London



Tammam Azzam, 'Damascus from Bon Voyage Series', 2013. Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery and the artist

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Publisher and Editorial Office

The London Middle East Institute
SOAS
University of London
MBI Al Jaber Building,
21 Russell Square, London WC1B 5EA
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0)20 7898 4330
E: lmei@soas.ac.uk
www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/

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The Middle East in London

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EVENTS IN LONDON

Philippe Fargues examines the consequences of Europe's closed-door policies for the security of both Europe and Syrian refugees

Don't close the doors!



Syrian refugees strike in front of Budapest Keleti railway station, Hungary, 2015. By Mstyslav Chernov

When Pope Francis visited a migrant detention centre in Lesbos in April and took back to Rome a dozen Syrian refugees facing deportation, he was openly rebuking the EU for its unethical deal with Turkey. A month earlier, a swap had been agreed upon: migrants smuggled from Turkey into Greece would be returned, and for every Syrian who arrived back in Turkey a recognised Syrian refugee from Turkey would be resettled in the EU. After a year of hesitation between open doors and barbed wire fences, Europe had eventually decided to keep additional refugees away.

On Europe's doorstep however, as the Syrian conflict enters its sixth year and Iraq fails to restore peace and security, forced displacement shows no sign of abating. The numbers are staggering. Since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, 4.8 million Syrians have found refuge in neighbouring countries, 650,000 in Europe and 30,000

in Canada, and internally displaced people (IDPs) are estimated at 7 million or more in a country of 23 million. In the same period, displacement from and within Iraq started to rise again, after a period of quiescence, with close to 200,000 Iraqis claiming asylum in Europe and 3 million IDPs in Iraq itself. Moreover, as borders are shutting against people fleeing violence, the number of IDPs trapped in their own countries and refugees stuck somewhere on their way to safe havens grow faster than the number of people granted international protection.

The discrepancy between forced migration in the Middle East and obstacles to international movements of people in need of protection, in and around the

region, raises two nagging questions: will there still be a haven for people fleeing war and persecution and will the refugee crisis fuel a security crisis?

First, unless stability returns to Syria and Iraq (not to mention Palestine), population displacement will continue while the re-emigration of refugees temporarily sheltered in Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey will gain momentum. Although the Middle East is source and host to 50 per cent of the world's 20 million refugees, most states in the region are not parties to the Refugee Convention of 1951. They generously accepted flows of refugees without offering them refugee status. They consider refugees 'guests', i.e. persons who cannot claim any

Although the Middle East is source and host to 50 per cent of the world's 20 million refugees, most states in the region are not parties to the Refugee Convention of 1951

For the sake of its own security, Europe must find a way around the disorderly, perilous crossing of the Mediterranean

rights, including the right to reside. If guests have no choice but to stay, a life in limbo awaits them.

Second, massive refugee flows have put considerable strain on their hosts. Offering a haven to the millions fleeing Syria, states like Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan are faced with a heavy burden on their economies – on housing, public services and the labour market – but also unforeseeable consequences for political stability and security. As communal lines are not congruent with national borders, many refugees found shelter on the other side of their homeland's border within their own community. But there is a risk that they will reinforce separatist inclinations or jeopardise fragile compromises.

So the influx of Syrian Kurds into Turkey and Iraq has strengthened, at least symbolically, Kurdish irredentism in both countries and reignited armed conflict. In Lebanon, inflows of mostly Sunni Syrians have overturned the *de facto* population make up, propelling their community to first place in demographic terms ahead of the equally dominant Shias and Maronites in political terms and fuelling violence in the northern city of Tripoli. In Jordan, it is not the sectarian composition of the flow but its very nature that generates tensions in a country where half of the citizens are themselves refugees from Palestine. The population in the receiving areas feels that it once again has been left alone to manage huge waves of displaced people.

Since the rise of the so-called Islamic State in 2014 that amplified forced migration in and from Syria and Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon have given up their initial openness, barred the way to new refugees and restricted the stay and access to livelihood for those already there. Prioritising security, the Lebanese government has adopted a harsh line towards refugees. The objective is to reduce their numbers and to prevent illegal employment that creates unfair competition for Lebanese workers. Many Syrian refugees are now overstaying on an expired residency

permit and risk deportation. Vulnerability is rapidly spreading among a population where 70 per cent of households are below the poverty line.

In Jordan, where refugees had received a temporary permit of stay at entry, the UNHCR is in charge of finding durable solutions. Because return to Syria and naturalisation in Jordan are excluded, the only solution left is resettlement elsewhere. But resettlement opportunities – a few thousands worldwide – do not match demand, so most Syrians risk illegality there. Moreover, for lack of funding the World Food Program has had to cut food assistance to refugees in urban neighbourhoods. As a result of the above trends, the total populations of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon have significantly decreased over the last two years.

In Turkey, which remains the last half-opened door at the border of Syria, the situation of refugees is deteriorating. On the one hand Turkey, a party to the UN Refugee Convention with a geographical limitation to Europe, offers only temporary asylum to non-Europeans (even though a law of 2013 grants them rights close to those of proper refugees). On the other hand, Turkey has signed an agreement with the EU aimed at keeping refugees away from Europe. This will have several unwanted outcomes. It will send Syrians in Turkey down longer and more perilous routes to be smuggled into Europe. It will mean locking up people

fleeing violence within Syria. It may even end in the *refoulement* of refugees; several cases have already been reported.

By subcontracting with Turkey (and next with Libya?) the containment of refugee flows in the Middle East, is Europe not risking further political destabilisation at its external borders? With mounting pressure in countries already faced with overwhelming numbers of refugees there are a series of risks: authoritarian drift in Turkey and state failure in Lebanon among them. For the sake of its own security, Europe must return to a policy of international protection and at the same time find a way around the disorderly, perilous crossing of the Mediterranean. Opening channels to asylum directly in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan is the way forward. Granting temporary humanitarian visas to refugees would allow them to reach Europe by regular means and lodge their asylum claim. It would save lives and it would save money. By the same token it would remove two unpleasant by-products of the current system: the smuggling business and terrorists smuggled into Europe with fake Syrian passports.

Philippe Fargues is Professor and founding Director of the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute, in Florence, Italy. His most recent book is Migration from North Africa and the Middle East: Skilled Migrants, Development and Globalisation (IB Tauris, 2015)

The Za'atari camp for Syrian refugees, Jordan. Photograph taken from a helicopter carrying US Secretary of State John Kerry and Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh (2013). By US Department of State



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