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Humanitarian consequences of the actions of the terrorist group known as "Islamic State"

Report[1]
Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons
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Summary

One year after the adoption of its last report on Syrian refugees, the Parliamentary Assembly can but note a constant worsening of the situation, in particular due to the rise of the terrorist group known as "Islamic State".

According to the UNHCR, 4 million refugees have fled the country and there are some 7.5 million internally displaced persons, whose situation is increasingly worrying. In 2014 alone, the conflict set a grim record of 76 000 deaths, including 3 500 children.

In the face of this unprecedented humanitarian crisis, the Assembly reiterates its appeal to States to show solidarity and a sense of responsibility, in particular by increasing the funds allocated to humanitarian organisations and supporting, as far as possible, the resettlement and humanitarian admission plan.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 13615, Reference 4085 of 3 October 2014.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. One year after the adoption of Resolution 1971 (2014) "Syrian refugees: how to organise and support international assistance?", the Parliamentary Assembly is dismayed to see that the situation has become considerably worse, giving rise to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

2. In the year 2014 alone, the conflict set a grim record, with 76 000 people killed, 3 500 of them children, and with thousands more reported missing, either in prisons or in areas controlled by the jihadists.

3. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately 11.5 million persons of concern, of whom 4 million are refugees, have fled the country, and there are around 7.5 million internally displaced persons. One of the consequences of this conflict is that Syrians have become the largest group of refugees under the UNHCR's mandate.

4. The Assembly is deeply concerned about the rise of the terrorist group known as "Islamic State" ("IS"), which is carrying out ever more war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, aggravating the conflict and consequently causing a huge influx of refugees to the neighbouring countries.

5. This arrival of huge numbers of Syrian refugees is not without effects on the neighbouring countries' socio-economic and political life, giving rise to ever-increasing tensions between the host countries' nationals and the Syrian refugees.

6. The Assembly would again like to pay tribute to the generosity of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, which alone have taken in almost 92% of the refugees, not without effects on those countries' socio-economic life.

7. It also welcomes both Germany's decision to take in some of the women raped by "IS" militants and the Swedish authorities' decision to grant permanent resident status to Syrian asylum seekers.

8. The Syrian conflict has resulted in the separation of large numbers of children from their families, as well as an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors, so the new generation of Syrians faces a risk of statelessness. Unaccompanied minors, women and girls represent a very high percentage of the refugees and find themselves in a situation which is worse than uncertain, and often dangerous, thus becoming archetypical victims of all kinds of exploitation and violence.

9. In Jordan and Turkey, for example, 85% of Syrian refugees live outside camps and are often without resources and resort to begging, adults and children alike, or they suffer exploitation.

10. The situation of internally displaced persons in Syria also gives cause for increasing concern, particularly in northern Syria, where attacks by "IS" prevent any assistance from reaching those families who find themselves in a situation of utter destitution, and where a medical and humanitarian disaster is occurring as a result of the lack of doctors and medicine and the re-emergence of diseases which had been eradicated, such as polio, tuberculosis, scabies and typhoid.

11. The Assembly notes and condemns the new rise in the numbers of victims of traffickers, particularly amongst migrants arriving via the Mediterranean Sea, and points to the need to put effective measures in place to combat such trafficking.

12. The Assembly notes that many countries are not taking people in as expected or issuing airport transit visas, repeats its appeal for international solidarity and asks States, whenever possible, to grant refugee status. In practice, Syrian refugees are often sent back or end up in detention centres. But Turkey has taken in a large number of Syrians and Germany, Sweden and Armenia have adopted measures to take in a limited number, through resettlement measures.

13. The Assembly welcomes and supports the UNHCR's proposal to put in place a resettlement policy and a humanitarian admission plan, and it encourages States to introduce that policy, which would enable larger numbers of Syrian refugees to be taken in, and particularly those who are members of the most vulnerable groups.

14. The Assembly reiterates its appeal to all States to show solidarity and responsibility in the face of this unprecedented humanitarian crisis and take all necessary steps to prevent their nationals from joining the ranks of "IS", and also to join forces in order to start a peace process in the region.

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 23 March 2015.

15. Consequently, the Assembly invites the member States of the Council of Europe, the observer States with the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly and all the States concerned by the situation of Syrian refugees to:

15.1. increase the funds allocated to humanitarian organisations, particularly the UNHCR, and actively support their activities;

15.2. support and make commitments to the setting up if possible of a resettlement and humanitarian admission plan;

15.3. provide temporary or international protection to Syrian refugees, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951 Geneva Convention), and allow them to work during that period, following the example of Turkey;

15.4. grant visas for the purposes of study or employment or for humanitarian or family reasons, particularly to the most vulnerable groups;

15.5. cease collective expulsions at land and sea borders and rescind the requirement for an airport transit visa for Syrian nationals;

15.6. ensure that they do not return refugees to countries lacking appropriate reception and protection capacities;

15.7. provide additional assistance to Syria's neighbouring countries and take measures to provide Syrian refugees with all the resources and supplies they need for subsistence, in terms of food, medicine, clothing and medical care;

15.8. give special attention to the internally displaced persons in Syria, who are in a situation which is worse than calamitous and lack the strict minimum they need for subsistence;

15.9. continue to implement protection and assistance programmes for the most vulnerable groups and take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of the women and children inside the camps;

15.10. take action against smugglers in the Mediterranean Basin;

15.11. combat statelessness, safeguarding the future of young Syrians as far as is possible;

15.12. take measures to facilitate the integration of Syrian refugees, putting comprehensive integration policies in place;

15.13. put in place training programmes for military and police personnel;

15.14. prosecute persons responsible for war crimes.

16. The Assembly also asks States, and particularly those States which are parties to the conflict, to take all necessary measures to involve women in the peace process and to comply with international law by allowing United Nations teams to do their work.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Bockel, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. One year after the adoption of Resolution 1971 (2014) "Syrian refugees: how to organise and support international assistance?", the humanitarian crisis in the region has reached an unprecedented scale.

2. This is due in large part to the rise of the terrorist group known as "Islamic State" ("IS"), which, on 29 June 2014, proclaimed the establishment of a caliphate on the Iraqi and Syrian territories under its control. This organisation bore other names such as "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL) and "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS) before adopting the name "Islamic State". For the purposes of this report, but without wishing to give it any official status, I will refer to the group as "IS".

3. Since 2006, this terrorist organisation has considered itself the true State of Iraq and, since 2013, that of Syria. "IS" has made the city of Raqqa (the main city of a governorate in the centre of Syria) its political and military capital, situated at the heart of the recently conquered Syrian territories.

4. It is regarded as the most violent jihadist movement in the world and is accused by the United Nations, the Arab League, the United States and the European Union of being a terrorist organisation responsible for war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

5. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), in 2014 alone, the conflict resulted in a grim total of 76 000 deaths including 3 500 children, compared to 73 000 in 2013 and nearly 50 000 in 2012, not counting the thousands of people who have disappeared in the regime's jails or among the jihadists. Added to this are some ten million refugees and displaced persons, and the illegal immigrants who have died at sea.

6. Since August 2014, an international coalition has been running a military operation against the organisation and, since mid-September 2014, a United States-French alliance has been carrying out air strikes on "IS" vehicles and sites. In addition, executions and offensives by "IS"'s jihadists are now daily occurrences in Iraq and Syria, resulting sometimes in the disappearance of entire communities.

7. As a result, the countries bordering on Syria have been faced with a major influx of Syrian refugees, and this poses enormous problems, whether it be from the humanitarian, socio-economic or political viewpoint. Since the adoption of Resolution 1971 (2014), another million refugees have left Syria.

8. Against this background, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons feels that there is an urgent need to alert the international community again.

9. For the purposes of this report, I have visited Geneva and Turkey. During my discussions in Geneva with representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), whom I would like to take this opportunity to thank for their warm welcome, everyone I spoke to agreed that at present there was no prospect of a solution. The talks enabled me to identify more clearly the contacts to be made in Turkey and to choose the region to visit. My discussion partners also highlighted the scale of the humanitarian crisis, which, in their view, was unprecedented.

10. I went to Turkey at the beginning of January 2015 to take stock of the situation on the ground, and I should like to thank both the UNHCR and the Turkish authorities for helping me organise the visit. In particular, I went to Gaziantep, Killis, Urfa and Ankara and, with the assistance of the Turkish authorities, was able to visit Killis refugee camp and a number of urban refugees in the region of Urfa.

11. The contacts I met in Ankara, whether the Director General of the Red Crescent, the Director of the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) or the Deputy Under-Secretary in the Ministry of the Interior, all made a very clear call to the international community to recognise the scale of the humanitarian crisis and act generously and responsibly.

2. The general situation of Syrian refugees

12. Since July 2014, the main areas over which "IS" has had control have been the eastern rural area of the Governorate of Aleppo, the Governorates of Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor and a part of the Governorate of Al-Hasakah. Gradually, their control has extended south, towards the Jordan–Iraq border, and north, to a part of Syrian Kurdistan near the border with Turkey.

13. Following this increase in hostilities, more and more Syrians have been fleeing their country, or their town or village, to escape “IS” troops. According to the SOHR, “IS” executed at least 1 429 people in Syria between June and November 2014. The groups affected the most have been women and girls who, when captured, are regarded as commodities, sex objects or spoils of war.

14. Consequently, since the beginning of the conflict in March 2011, some 9 million refugees have fled Syria and there are some 6.5 million internally displaced persons. A large number have left for the neighbouring countries of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan or Iraq, while others have travelled to the Caucasus, the Persian Gulf or North Africa. Some 150 000 Syrians have requested asylum in a European Union country.

15. In September 2014, the Swedish authorities stated that all Syrian asylum seekers would have a permanent right of residence in view of the escalation of the conflict. Sweden was thus one of the first countries to make such an offer, meaning not only that some 8 000 Syrians would be able to reside permanently in Sweden but also that their families would be allowed to join them by virtue of family reunification rights.

16. Other non-European countries in South America, namely Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, have made the same offer.

17. However, Syrian refugees are finding it increasingly difficult to get over the border, as they have become obvious targets for trafficking. For instance, refugees wishing to cross the desert to the east of Jordan are forced to pay traffickers to be able to pass through safely. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to find jobs, food and housing in the neighbouring countries, despite the assistance provided by organisations, in particular the UNHCR.

18. It is for this reason that halting the food aid provided through the World Food Programme would be catastrophic for all these people, and I therefore reiterate my appeal of 5 December, highlighting the wretched situation of destitution in which these people find themselves.

3. Recent developments since the adoption of Resolution 1971 (2014)

19. Since the adoption of Resolution 1971 (2014), the situation in Syria has deteriorated still further and it has become impossible to keep track of the number of attacks and executions, whether on the borders of Syria or of Iraq. This relates above all to women, girls and children, who account for the large majority of Syrian refugees. In this context, I would like to welcome the German decision to accommodate women raped by “IS” activists and I would call on the solidarity of the international community to follow this example.

20. I would also point out that Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt alone have taken in 95% of the refugees, which has had an impact on social and economic life in those countries.

3.1. Turkey

21. For the purposes of this report, I will focus mainly on the situation and reception of Syrians and on the exceptional role played in this matter by Turkey, which, for a long time, was a transit country to the European Union but has now become a host country for asylum seekers.

3.1.1. The Directive on temporary protection

22. Turkey ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees while making the reservation that the convention applied only to persons displaced because of events in Europe. When Turkey signed the 1967 Protocol, it specifically reiterated this geographical limitation.

23. Consequently, Turkey had no legal obligation towards refugees fleeing their country because of events outside Europe. Non-European nationals had access neither to refugee status nor to the right to a permanent residence permit. Refugees recognised as such by the UNHCR as needing international protection had permission to seek asylum in another country. Nonetheless, since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, the Turkish authorities have made an exception for Syrian refugees by considering them to be “guests”. It should be noted that this guest status had already been granted by the Turkish authorities to Chechens fleeing the war in Chechnya. This status as “guest of the State” would seem to be temporary and reversible, and permanently to imply some threat of expulsion. Accordingly, before the recent amendment to legislation, Turkey refused to establish a refugee protection system and delegated this task to the UNHCR. This was

because Turkey believed that these refugees were not destined to remain in Turkey but to be resettled in other countries. However, owing to the massive influx of refugees, it became impossible for the UNHCR to resettle all of them.

24. Since 22 October 2014, Turkey has amended its legislation on temporary protection for refugees, establishing a new definition, new criteria and a new procedure for asylum. The new regulation applies to Syrian nationals and stateless persons coming from Syria. The main innovations are the centralisation of all migration-related procedures within a Directorate for Migration and Asylum and the establishment of a civilian border control agency replacing the army, whose aim is to be incorporated into the European Border Surveillance System. This reform introduces the idea of integration for refugees for the first time and is aimed at improving their access to free health care and the labour market.

25. What is important now is to be able to implement this new legislation as quickly as possible.

3.1.2. The situation of Syrians

26. According to the latest estimates provided by the UNHCR, there are about 1 600 000 registered Syrian refugees, 223 000 of whom are living in one of the 22 camps and 891 000 of whom live outside the camps. Minors account for 51% of the total number of refugees. A new influx of refugees was recorded following the offensive by “IS” fighters against the Kurdish city of Ain al-Arab (or Kobane in Kurdish) in northern Syria. As a result, over 150 000 Syrian Kurds entered Turkey in a few days. With this new influx, it is feared that the Turkish authorities will no longer be able to cope. According to a report by Amnesty International, increasing numbers of refugees are refused entry and shot at with live ammunition at the borders.

27. According to the authorities in the region of Suruç, between 500 and 600 people are waiting to cross the border.

28. At the official border posts, Turkey applies an open-border policy for Syrians, but only two such posts are fully open along a 900-km stretch of border. Yet, even at these official border posts, people without passports are regularly refused entry unless they require emergency medical or humanitarian assistance.

29. The effect of this is that most refugees try to get over the border at unofficial transit points, which are not easily accessible, and unfortunately, when these lie in conflict zones, they rely on the help of smugglers.

3.1.3. The specific situation of Kurdish Syrians

30. However, a large number of the Kurdish refugees from Syria have preferred to prolong their journey, making for the remote Gawilan camp in Iraq, having found that living conditions have become very difficult in Turkey. People live on the street or in crowded mosques without any food or money and some refugees arriving at the border in cars have been forced to leave them there. A large majority of Syrians of Turkish origin have been travelling to northern Iraq, where they have family or friends.

31. Looking more particularly at the Kurdish Syrian refugees in Turkey, a large majority live in urban areas, with no other resources than income from undeclared jobs or begging. No real special provision has been made for their protection or assistance, particularly in terms of access to health care, employment and housing. The growing number of refugees on the streets of large cities contributes to the increased hostility of the local population, who are increasingly alarmed by the influx of foreigners. To house and feed themselves, families take desperate measures, which frequently include making their children work.

32. At the presidential election, the resolution of the “Kurdish question” was a major focus of discussions, which led, on 10 July 2014, to the adoption of an outline law to put a stop to terrorism and to reinforce social integration.

33. Since then, developments have speeded up and in January the Kurds and the Kurdish People’s Protection Units announced the liberation of Kobane. However, in spite of the announcement of the liberation of this Syrian town, “IS” continues to be a threat, as fighting is still going on in the surrounding villages and the town has been completely devastated and is just a mass of ruins and gutted and deserted buildings. This is hindering the return of the some 200 000 Syrians who have sought refuge in Turkey. Their return is all the more theoretical since the Turkish authorities are prohibiting them from crossing the border and the Kurdish forces are concerned about residents’ health and safety because there is no housing in a decent state of repair and food supplies are beginning to run short.

3.1.4. New labour legislation

34. The Turkish Government has changed its labour legislation with regard to the roughly 1.6 million refugees in the country and allowed them to work officially in certain clearly defined sectors insofar as the number of Syrians employed does not exceed 10% of total employees. A lack of resources is also affecting safety in the camps.

3.2. Lebanon

35. Since my visit to Lebanon, in August 2013, the situation there has worsened, as the crisis in Syria is still weighing heavily on the country. Lebanon has a population of around 4 million and, according to the latest estimates, it has taken in nearly 1 133 000 refugees. Lebanon is therefore indisputably the neighbouring country which has been most affected by the conflict. As I already noted in my previous report, the numbers of Syrian refugees and the impact of the economic crisis have affected Lebanon particularly seriously.

36. Syrian refugees have moreover always been a feature in Lebanon as, since the end of the Lebanese civil war and the 1989 Taif agreement and the agreements signed by Syria and Lebanon, many Syrians have come to Lebanon looking for work, mainly in the Beirut region.

37. Syrian refugees are indeed in a very vulnerable situation, particularly because, for the time being, there is no legislation to help them. It should also be noted here that Lebanon still does not grant Syrian refugees any official status, but does recognise the status of Palestinian refugees. Furthermore, unlike Jordan and Turkey, Lebanon has not set up camps, and so refugees are scattered throughout the country.

38. Lebanese families who were living in Syria but have fled and now face the same challenges as other refugees find themselves in an unusual situation. They are often regarded as Syrians and frequently they are not aware of, or familiar with, the services available to them.

39. In this respect, there is an urgent need to improve the system of registration for Syrian refugees and to inform them about the assistance measures available to them.

40. Nonetheless, in order to limit the influx of refugees, for the first time, Lebanon has decided to regulate the entry requirements for Syrian nationals by applying procedures provided by the Geneva Convention. Consequently, visas are issued for the purposes of tourism, medical treatment, studies, transit or consultation of a foreign embassy for all those who are sponsored by a Lebanese national. Temporary residence permits are granted to business people and property owners. To be entitled to a tourist visa, applicants must have a hotel booking, a valid identity document and at least 1 000 dollars.

41. In reaction, the UNHCR spokesperson has pointed out that these new rules do not include “a clause referring explicitly to exceptional humanitarian grounds, as was planned in the government policy of October 2014” and “that it is the UNHCR’s international responsibility to ensure that refugees are not forced to return to situations in which their lives would be in danger”.

42. Particular attention should also be paid to children, considering that, according to available estimates, 24% of refugees are aged between 4 and 17 and they do not attend school for various reasons, such as school fees, growing insecurity and transport problems.

43. In this context, tribute should be paid to the work of the IOM in helping and assisting migrants in transit through Lebanon wishing to travel to Austria, Canada, Denmark, Norway and the United States.

3.3. Jordan

44. According to the information collected, there has been a significant decrease in the number of people at the registration centre despite the UNHCR’s efforts to improve access to Jordan for Syrian refugees. Currently, around 650 000 Syrian refugees live in Jordan, in other words some 100 000 more since my last report. Jordan’s decision to restrict access to its territory is prompted in particular by security problems. According to information received from Jordan authorities, the number of trials implicating Syrians increased by 132% between 2011 and 2014. Food and water are supplied by the IOM and the ICRC in co-operation with the Jordanian border authorities. The UNHCR has also provided blankets. However, in winter weather, it is clear that refugees face hygiene problems and risks of a deterioration in their state of health, so much so that a number of refugees have returned to Zaatari camp. Currently, Jordan has only three camps, and the result is that nearly 75% of refugees live outside the camps, either on the streets or in makeshift accommodation.

45. Despite an overall decrease in the number of refugees arriving in Jordan in 2014, UNICEF noted an increase in the number of unaccompanied Syrian children as compared to 2013. According to the latest estimates, there are around 4 500 unaccompanied Syrian children.

46. I would like to pay tribute to the Back to School campaign, launched by UNICEF and Save the Children, which has reached over 100 000 people, contacted through door-to-door visits or at refugee registration points, and encouraged families to send their children to school, with the result that some 19 500 students attend classes in the Zaatari, Azraq and Emirati-Jordanian camps.

3.4. Iraq

47. In September 2014, Amnesty International published a report accusing "IS" of carrying out a systematic ethnic cleansing campaign in northern Iraq and conducting mass executions. In October 2014, "IS" claimed responsibility for the most vicious attack, in which two car bombs exploded simultaneously in a Baghdad shopping area causing 14 deaths and wounding 34 people. According to information collected by the UNHCR, the Iraqi authorities have begun to legalise the residence of Syrians who have entered Iraq via the Peshkhabour border crossing. According to the latest estimates, there are some 226 000 refugees in Iraq.

48. The UNHCR has also identified and assisted 588 particularly vulnerable people, including people in a poor state of health, pregnant women and unaccompanied minors.

49. With regard more specifically to the question of education, the government of the Iraqi region of Kurdistan has announced that it can no longer pay the wages of refugee teachers, as it has not received any grants from the Iraqi Central Government.

4. The situation of unaccompanied and stateless minors and of women and girls

50. The Syrian conflict has resulted in many children being separated from their families, meaning they are paying a high price for the conflict. Some of them have lost their parents, have fled for fear of being enlisted by militias or have been placed in the care of relatives by their parents. Minors form a very large share of the refugee population, whether in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan or Iraq. The situation has worsened recently with the arrival of ghost ships carrying migrants including large numbers of unaccompanied and undocumented minors. Many of them have been injured, detained or used as human shields. According to the information received, there are approximately 2 million children in need of assistance in Syria and over half a million in neighbouring countries, many of whom are living in camps. The increasing number of arrivals in the camps is putting added pressure on the available resources and having various impacts, in particular in terms of access to education which is becoming a little more limited, even though it is a vital activity.

51. The situation of these children varies according to the host country. In Jordan, for instance, Zaatari, the largest camp, has taken in minors, 20% of whom were aged under five years. In this connection, UNICEF and Save the Children have established special reception areas with playgrounds, sports fields, discussion groups and art activities. I would underline here that, as I was able to see for myself during my visit to Turkey, the children's drawings serve as kinds of outlets, as they very often depict scenes of violence. I remember the picture of the 11-year-old Syrian refugee in Turkey which went viral on social media. The child was crying and bleeding because he had just been hit by a restaurant manager for trying to eat a customer's chips. That was a symbol of the suffering of Syrian refugee children in Turkey. Naturally, the restaurant manager was fired.

52. While praise must go to the Turkish authorities for their efforts and generosity in taking in the refugees, it has to be acknowledged that the influx of refugees has caused tensions with some Turks. One of the reasons is the increasing number of Syrian children to be seen on the streets in big cities like Ankara and Istanbul, whose only options are begging or scavenging for food.

53. The Turkish authorities have organised classes for the Syrian children, but the teaching mainly takes place in the camps. The children outside the refugee camps have become the forgotten victims of the conflict. Donations are sent to the camps, whereas it is those outside the camps who are in the greatest hardship and half of the Syrian children in Turkey do not attend school. Admittedly, some Turkish schools do cater for Turkish children for part of the day and then for Syrian children for a few hours. However, they are too small and do not have the financial resources for taking in all the children. According to the information received, schools have also become places of tension between Syrian and Turkish children, with the latter feeling hard done by in relation to Syrian children who get more attention from staff and the authorities. A further problem is the fact that the Syrian families do not have enough money to survive and even if some children may have the possibility of going to school, they cannot do so because their families depend on them for financial

survival. If the children go to school, the families have to do without additional income which they could earn through begging. Moreover, sending children to school involves extra costs, for instance for transport, which the families have difficulty meeting.

54. In the Syrian refugee camps in Iraqi Kurdistan, half of the residents are aged under 17, and most have crossed the border illegally to seek refuge in a country where their safety is no longer at risk.

55. Family reunification remains the primary objective. The utmost efforts are made to try and find the children's families – which is a real challenge, given the number of refugees arriving every day. An alternative is finding foster families.

56. Questions therefore hang over the future of young migrants who have not found their parents or are stateless or orphaned.

57. The situation is also very insecure and often dangerous for girls and young women. Men have tried to enter the camps and exert pressure on young Syrian refugee women by offering them (early) marriages as the price for financial security and physical protection. Some of the women accept these marriages, which will often obscure situations of sexual exploitation.

5. The situation of internally displaced persons in Syria

58. Since the beginning of the conflict in March 2011, some 6.5 million people have been displaced within the borders of Syria and 190 000 killed. The situation is becoming an increasing cause for concern, as it is estimated that approximately 10.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), about 6.8 million people have been forced to abandon their homes and hence their means of subsistence.

59. Attacks and raids by "IS" activists prevent access to these displaced families, who are suffering increasingly from shortages of food and medicine, cannot send their children to school and face security threats.

60. In this context, Syrian doctors, most of whom are members of the Union of Syrian Medical Relief Organizations (UDSSM), who recently met in Paris, have alerted the international community to the "medical and humanitarian disaster" in Syria, along with the disastrous consequences of the increasing shortage of doctors, equipment and medicine and the re-emergence of diseases which had been eradicated such as polio, tuberculosis, scabies and typhoid.

61. They point out that "the situation has become unbearable and catastrophic and that many parts of Syria no longer have any medical facilities". In Aleppo, the second largest city in the country, only five hospitals are functioning and there are only 30 doctors from all specialist health fields who are still practising. In the suburbs of Damascus, in an area which has been surrounded for two years by loyalist forces, there is no means of getting any humanitarian aid in.

62. In Raqqa, which is the bastion of "IS" in northern Syria and has a population of 1.6 million, there are no longer any obstetric, gynaecological or paediatric services.

6. The urgent need for food aid and for basic necessities

63. The scale of the humanitarian consequences is vast and unprecedented. I would call again on the solidarity of the international community to increase humanitarian aid in order to provide enough water, food, health care and decent accommodation for the refugees.

64. To this end, I would reiterate my appeal for donors to continue to pay funds to the World Food Programme so that local and international bodies can respond properly to meet the basic needs of people affected by the Syrian crisis, whose effects have been compounded since the upsurge in the activities of "IS".

65. For instance, according to information from the UNHCR, unregistered refugees or those who have not pre-registered are not entitled to health care. Furthermore, in northern Turkey, doctors have reported that children are suffering from malnutrition and dehydration and that there are no longer any ambulances to deal with emergencies.

7. Limited and varied granting of asylum

66. Europe has a duty to react and help the Syrians. European Union countries have imposed an airport transit visa for Syrian nationals wishing to travel through their territory to reach other States. Obtaining such visas is difficult, however, and the measure enables States to send individuals who do not have them back to the countries where they came from.

67. For those who manage to reach the European Union, the reception they receive is not necessarily what they expected. Some countries such as Germany and Sweden almost systematically grant protection, but the same is not true in other EU States. For instance, the UNHCR has expressed concern about States' tendency to grant subsidiary protection or leave of stay on humanitarian grounds rather than refugee status.

68. In Greece, which is one of the main points of entry for Syrians, they encounter many obstacles in terms of registering asylum applications, and detention in conditions that often breach human rights is a common practice.

8. Resettlement as a tool of solidarity

69. Following the influx of refugees, the UNHRC proposed that States introduce a resettlement policy and a humanitarian admission programme. The latter is aimed primarily at the most vulnerable individuals and is modelled on the admission plan for Kosovars in 1999. It should be noted that resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third country that admits them as refugees with a permanent residence status. Humanitarian admission is a process which affords similar but fast-track protection in a third country for refugees who are most vulnerable in a given region.

70. The success of these proposals depends on States' commitment. Unfortunately, the proposals concern only a tiny proportion of the Syrian refugees. In particular, they concern individuals regarded as vulnerable refugees who could make a contribution to the reconstruction of Syria after the conflict or individuals who have family members living in the country concerned.

71. Germany was the first country to volunteer to take in Syrian refugees under the temporary admission programme. Over 40 000 Syrians accordingly live in Germany and have been naturalised.

72. The United Kingdom has established a vulnerable person's relocation scheme for Syrian refugees and taken in 90 people. Ireland has launched a Syrian humanitarian admission programme and has accepted 111 people. I would like to take the opportunity to praise the initiative of setting up a core group on Syrian resettlement comprised of resettlement countries and chaired by Sweden, in co-operation with the UNHCR, which enables the host countries to exchange information on the implementation of the resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes for Syrian refugees.

73. I can therefore only encourage our Organisation's member States to follow these examples and can only endorse the call made by the United Nations in December 2014 to donor countries to continue taking in as many Syrian refugees as possible.

9. Conclusion and recommendations

74. In light of the growing numbers of acts of violence, the Parliamentary Assembly has a duty to condemn them and call on governments to unite to order the protagonists to put an end as soon as possible to the massacres that are being carried out.

75. Member and non-member States of the Council of Europe must do everything in their power to seek a means of restoring peace to the region.

76. I would like to reiterate my appeal to the governments of the Council of Europe member and observer States and States whose parliaments enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly to help to prolong and to increase the supplies of humanitarian aid and to boost the assistance they provide.

77. Lastly, it seems to me to be absolutely essential to remind the European Union member States to implement Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof, and to ask all States to show solidarity and a sense of shared responsibility.