



Batoul Taha, 18, from Syria, now lives in Chicago with her mother, father and two brothers. They had been living in Damascus before fleeing to Lebanon. Batoul has a keen interest in drawing and fashion design. Courtesy of a volunteer group at a local church, she attended a six-week course at the Art Institute of Chicago this summer. Photo: Coco McCabe/Oxfam America

# WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY

Safe havens needed for refugees from Syria

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Oxfam's research shows that less than three percent of the Syrian refugee population have actually arrived in rich countries through resettlement programmes. By analysing resettlement policies and practices in eight key countries, looking at capacity (i.e. investment in staff and facilities), security procedures, resettlement criteria and the general political climate towards refugees, this paper shows why resettling at least 10 percent of the refugee population from Syria is both necessary and possible.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The conflict in Syria has escalated in the last year, with continued attacks on schools and hospitals, and humanitarian assistance failing to reach vast numbers of people in need. Almost seven million people are displaced within Syria, and nearly five million more have fled the country and are now registered as refugees in neighbouring countries.<sup>1</sup>

Syria's neighbours have shown generosity in welcoming millions of people, despite the enormous impact this has had on their public services. Refugees from Syria themselves are striving, where they can, both to support their families and to contribute to their host societies. Nevertheless, in a context of increasing restrictions on refugees in stretched neighbouring countries, encouraged by anti-refugee sentiment in rich nations, 10 percent of the refugees from Syria are estimated to be particularly vulnerable and in need of resettlement.

Without a commitment from rich countries to share responsibility, by resettling refugees and committing to other forms of support, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt are likely to continue to display more signs of worsening practices.<sup>2</sup> And more desperate people will be unable to even flee Syria as the conflict rages on, their basic right to seek safety completely denied.

Oxfam has consistently urged states to commit collectively to offering a safe haven, through resettlement and other forms of humanitarian admission, for at least 10 percent of the Syrian refugee population by the end of 2016.<sup>3</sup> Offering safe havens will transform the lives of the most vulnerable and be an act of concrete solidarity with countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey that are hosting the vast majority of refugees.

However, less than three percent of the Syrian refugee population have actually been resettled in rich countries. The majority of this group have resettled in just two countries: Canada and Germany. By analysing resettlement policies and practices in eight key countries, looking at capacity (i.e. investment in staff and facilities), security procedures, resettlement criteria and the general political climate towards refugees, this paper shows that pledging and following through on the resettlement of at least 10 percent of refugees from Syria is both necessary and possible. This must not be at the expense of resettling other national groups, however, and an increase in resettlement must also be accompanied by a commitment to end the use of harsh measures to limit or deter asylum seekers arriving spontaneously at the borders of rich countries.

Oxfam calls on countries to redouble their efforts, and to ensure 10 percent of the Syrian refugee population is resettled by the end of 2017. Drawing on the case studies discussed in this paper, Oxfam has formulated the following recommendations to ensure states uphold refugees' rights, and scale up their resettlement commitments in 2017:

- Political and civic leaders should show political will and leadership.
- At a minimum, rich countries should commit to resettle their fair share of 10 percent of the refugees from Syria currently living in countries neighbouring Syria by the end of 2017.
- Governments should match local willingness with action themselves.

**Ahmed Abizaid,**  
Syrian refugee  
resettled to the  
USA:

*'We feel safe. And what's more important, I'm seeing the order here. The order in America is the best. For example, when I see my children walk to and from school and I'm not worried about them.'*

- Resettlement countries should adhere to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria.
- Countries should expedite resettlement for refugees facing urgent risks.
- Governments should consider introducing private sponsorship models to complement government-assisted resettlement.
- Receiving countries should address obstacles in countries neighbouring Syria, including taking measures to resettle vulnerable refugees who are unable to register with UNHCR.
- Countries should adhere to the principle of dependency in family reunification and ensure that the process to apply for a family member to reunite with relatives is efficient, expedient and non-conditional.
- States must respect the rights of asylum seekers who arrive spontaneously.
- Donors should fund UNHCR's application-processing activities.
- Non-traditional resettlement countries should increase their intake of refugees, while guaranteeing their rights in line with the UN Refugee Convention.

### SOME IMPORTANT TERMS

**Resettlement** is an option whereby a third country (i.e. not the one the refugee has fled from, or the country of first asylum or habitual residence) offers refugee status to that individual in its territory.

**Humanitarian admission** programmes are much like resettlement, but normally involve expedited processing, often without the involvement of UNHCR, and may provide either permanent or temporary stay depending on the legislation or policy of the state offering this option. Humanitarian admissions criteria are sometimes based on factors other than protection risk or vulnerability, such as existing links to the country offering admission.

**Other forms of admission** could include allowing Syrian refugees legal access to third countries by relaxing requirements for entry visas to work and study, not necessarily based upon their vulnerabilities.

**Asylum:** Civilians facing persecution or other risks resulting from armed conflict or massive violations of human rights have a right to flee to safety across international borders and request asylum in another country. States have specific obligations towards asylum seekers under international law, particularly the obligation not to forcibly return them to harm (the principle of *non-refoulement*). Many refugees from Syria have sought asylum in countries beyond neighbouring countries. These countries outside the region have the obligation to ensure the right of Syrians to seek asylum at their borders, in addition to responsibility-sharing through increased resettlement.

A **refugee** is a person who cannot return to his/her country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of persecution or serious and indiscriminate threats to life, physical integrity or freedom.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The conflict in Syria has escalated in the last year, with continued attacks on schools and hospitals, and humanitarian assistance failing to reach vast numbers of people in need. The consequences for civilians are devastating and widespread. Nearly five million refugees have fled Syria and are registered as refugees in neighbouring countries. With borders increasingly sealed, an inadequate aid response, and national capacities to deal with such staggering numbers of people stretched past breaking point, the situation for those who have fled or wish to flee Syria is worsening.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has estimated that at least 10 percent of the refugee population in countries neighbouring Syria are particularly vulnerable and in need of resettlement.<sup>4</sup> In a call for solidarity and responsibility sharing, since September 2015, Oxfam has called for those most at risk to be resettled or offered other forms of humanitarian admission.

Resettlement will not solve the refugee crisis, much less the conflict inside Syria. But it can transform the lives of the most vulnerable and – along with a fully funded aid response, increased development financing, and a commitment to uphold all rights of refugees– be part of a package that will provide hope for refugees. It will also be a concrete act of solidarity with those neighbouring countries that host the vast majority of men, women and children who have fled the violence in Syria.

## **Oxfam's 'fair share' analysis**

Oxfam is calling for 10 percent of the total population of refugees registered in countries neighbouring Syria to be resettled or offered humanitarian admission in rich countries that have signed the UN Refugee Convention. This 10 percent corresponds to the number of refugees whom UNHCR has identified as being vulnerable.

Oxfam has calculated the specific numbers it would consider to be a 'fair share' based upon the size of the economies of these rich countries.<sup>5</sup>

Following the death of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old refugee from Syria whose body washed up on the shores of Turkey in September 2015, there was an outpouring of solidarity with refugees from people all over the world. Some governments followed the lead of their citizens and turned solidarity into action.. Canada and Germany combined, for example, have resettled more than 80,000 refugees from Syria since 2013. The UK, Australia and other countries pledged increased resettlement places for thousands of Syrian refugees.

However, despite three major intergovernmental conferences and summits that discussed resettlement, and the escalation of the deadly conflict in Syria, very few new pledges have been made in 2016.<sup>6</sup> Oxfam's research shows that less than three percent of the estimated Syrian refugee population have actually arrived in rich countries through resettlement programmes.

Committing to the resettlement of at least 10 percent of refugees from Syria, based on vulnerability criteria, is both necessary and possible. Looking at eight

resettlement countries to analyse and compare barriers to resettlement, including capacity (i.e. investment in staff and facilities), security procedures, resettlement criteria and the general political climate towards refugees, it is clear that some countries have overcome these barriers while others have not. Other challenges, such as the lack of legal pathways other than resettlement / humanitarian admission programmes, unregistered refugees and barriers in refugee-hosting countries, have also contributed to this failure by the international community to share more equitably the responsibility for hosting vulnerable refugees.

## URGENT COMMITMENTS ARE NEEDED

With almost five million refugees from Syria registered in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt, governments and communities in these countries have shown incredible generosity. Refugees from Syria themselves are striving, where they can, to both support their families and to contribute to their host societies. However, the responsibility for hosting refugees has had an enormous impact on public services in countries neighbouring Syria, some of which already faced high unemployment and poverty rates before the crisis. International financial support and commitments promised at the London Conference in February 2016 are welcome, but these have been slow to translate to changes in people's lives, and 10 percent of the refugee population remain particularly vulnerable.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, authorities in some hosting countries have introduced restrictive measures. In Lebanon, for example, Syrian refugees who arrived after 5 January 2015 are no longer registered by UNHCR, on instruction from the Lebanese government. This leaves a significant number of refugees without formal legal protection, creating additional barriers to access humanitarian assistance, such as health services and food vouchers. It also hinders their ability to access resettlement through UNHCR.

Following the EU-Turkey deal to push migrants back to Turkey and in the face of security concerns, Turkey is building a wall to seal off the country's border with Syria, even as the fighting escalates, denying the right of Syrian women, men and children to flee violence. At the border with Jordan, more than 85,000 Syrian asylum-seekers are stranded in a no man's land called the 'berm', without access to asylum and with limited access to humanitarian aid.

These policies must be seen in the context of increasingly restrictive and anti-refugee policies in countries in the 'Global North'. Restrictive practices in Europe, Australia and the United States have likely had an influence on the behaviour of states directly neighbouring Syria. Without a commitment to sharing responsibility and the acknowledgment that resettlement is one of the three durable solutions for refugees,<sup>9</sup> Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt are likely to also continue to display more signs of worsening practices.<sup>10</sup> Some of these states have even called for refugees to return to Syria, which would be a clear violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*.

*Addressing foreign ministers on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in 2015, **Lebanon's Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil** said:*

*'Imagine that Lebanon, a poor country, with a population of four million people, is bearing the load of two million refugees, while a rich continent like Europe, with a population of 500 million people, is still debating whether or not it should receive 120,000 refugees.'*<sup>7</sup>

**Lebanon: Hannan Hassan Al Khalaf, 20-year-old Syrian refugee in the Bekaa, Lebanon**

Hannan fled Raqqa in Syria with her family, leaving all their belongings behind, and has been living in a tent in the Bekaa for more than three years. She told Oxfam: 'We had a lot of bombings in Raqqa, air raids, bombing all around us.' Despite having been in Lebanon for years, it hasn't got much easier for the family. The cold, wet winters in the Bekaa are particularly tough. Hannan and her family work hard to meet their basic needs but her husband is sick, and can't find day jobs easily. 'My husband works in the field and does jobs for the neighbours but he has a disease in his leg and is unable to work all the time.'

**UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi** (Twitter, 3 November 2016):

*'239 feared dead in Mediterranean, again: so many lives could be saved through more resettlement and legal pathways to protection.'*



Oxfam has campaigned for 10 percent of the Syrian refugees registered by UNHCR in neighbouring countries (equivalent to about 480,000 people), to be resettled or offered humanitarian admission by the end of 2016, in rich countries that have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention. The table below looks at admissions from countries since 2013 against a 'fair share' calculated on the basis of the size of their economy. As of figures available on 6 December 2016, only 130,701 people have arrived in these countries through resettlement or humanitarian admissions programmes.<sup>11</sup> This is the equivalent of 2.7 percent of the entire registered Syrian refugee population.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1: Resettlement arrival figures compared with countries' fair share**

|                       | Arrivals      | Fair share    | % of fair share contributed | Key                           |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Australia             | 10044         | 10552         | 95%                         | >90% fair share contributed   |
| Austria               | 1476          | 4008          | 37%                         | 50-90% fair share contributed |
| Belgium               | 644           | 4771          | 13%                         | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Canada                | 39532         | 15945         | 248%                        | >90% fair share contributed   |
| Czech Republic        | 52            | 2794          | 2%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Denmark               | 385           | 2600          | 15%                         | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Finland               | 1268          | 2246          | 56%                         | 50-90% fair share contributed |
| France                | 1800          | 25926         | 7%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Germany               | 43570         | 36854         | 117%                        | >90% fair share contributed   |
| Greece                | 0             | 3084          | 0%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Iceland               | 70            | 118           | 59%                         | 50-90% fair share contributed |
| Ireland <sup>13</sup> | 669           | 1773          | 38%                         | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Italy                 | 575           | 21510         | 3%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Japan                 | 0             | 49747         | 0%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Korea, Republic of    | 0             | 16643         | 0%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Luxembourg            | 101           | 376           | 27%                         | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Netherlands           | 599           | 7854          | 8%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| New Zealand           | 472           | 1418          | 33%                         | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Norway                | 5185          | 3610          | 144%                        | >90% fair share contributed   |
| Poland                | 0             | 8768          | 0%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Portugal              | 12            | 2804          | 0%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Slovakia              | 0             | 1440          | 0%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Spain                 | 289           | 16031         | 2%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Sweden                | 2159          | 4513          | 48%                         | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Switzerland           | 666           | 4835          | 14%                         | <50% fair share contributed   |
| United Kingdom        | 4414          | 25056         | 18%                         | <50% fair share contributed   |
| United States         | 16719         | 170709        | 10%                         | <50% fair share contributed   |
| Russia                | 0             | 35038         | 0%                          | <50% fair share contributed   |
| <b>TOTALS</b>         | <b>130701</b> | <b>481022</b> | <b>n/a</b>                  |                               |

## OTHER SAFE AND REGULAR ROUTES ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT

It is clear that the international community needs to share the responsibility for refugees more equitably, not just in relation to the Syria refugee crisis.<sup>14</sup>

Resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes are important components of this responsibility sharing, a point that has been reiterated by many states, most recently in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted in September 2016.<sup>15</sup> These programmes target those refugees who are in immediate need of protection.

However, commitments to resettle refugees who are at particular risk must not be used to limit routes for refugees seeking safety spontaneously (by requesting asylum at a border). Using resettlement as a justification to reduce, limit or even end acceptance of those seeking asylum at borders contradicts the entire humanitarian purpose of resettlement.

All refugees have the right, guaranteed under international law, to put forward their asylum claims. The 1951 Refugee Convention in particular forbids the punishment of asylum seekers who arrive spontaneously in the territory of a third state. Neither can they be returned to places where they risk facing persecution on account of their civil or political status, or other serious human rights violations.

Nor should they be penalized, like asylum seekers under the EU-Turkey deal who have tried to flee to Europe and are not only being sent back to Turkey (to be 'swapped' with registered Syrian refugees who have fled to and stayed in Turkey) but are no longer being considered for resettlement, regardless of how vulnerable they are.

**Other forms of admission** for refugees, including opportunities for labour mobility and for education, such as scholarships and student visas, should be expanded in addition to those offered resettlement through humanitarian admission. These other pathways not only reduce the pressure on refugees to make dangerous and costly journeys to safety; they also allow states who receive refugees to establish formal screening and facilitation procedures.<sup>16</sup>

One important additional form of admission is family reunification. It is essential that family reunification is a viable and timely option for refugees, and that the criteria for eligibility are expanded so as to adhere to the principle of dependency.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the process to start reunifying families needs to be accelerated. Currently, refugees often need to wait until they obtain residency before they can join their families, which can take years. The financial barriers to family reunification also need to be addressed.

Offering a safe haven to refugees from Syria **must not be at the expense of refugees from other countries**. This is why, in addition to expanding their traditional resettlement programmes, states should also explore all other avenues to offer humanitarian admission and other immigration options for the most vulnerable refugees from Syria and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup>



## 2 CASE STUDIES

Examining the resettlement process in eight important resettlement countries makes it possible to obtain a clear understanding of the practical and political barriers involved.

Oxfam has evaluated the process of resettling Syrian refugees by looking at five criteria: political commitment to resettle refugees; resettlement criteria and family reunification; security checks; investment in capacity, staff and facilities; and reception conditions. See Appendix 1 for a short explanation of these criteria.<sup>19</sup>

These case studies inform our policy recommendations on how countries can improve their resettlement efforts and scale up their performances to take in at least 10 percent of Syrian refugees through resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes.

### United States of America

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>Fair share</i>                                | 170,709 Syrian refugees                                   |
| <i>Actually resettled refugees</i>               | 16,719 Syrian refugees                                    |
| <i>Average waiting time</i>                      | 18 months with some cases taking up to four or five years |
| <i>Adheres to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria</i> | Yes   |

The USA is the largest country of resettlement in the world. It has managed a successful, bipartisan refugee programme for four decades, supported by both Democratic and Republican administrations. In 2016, the US government pledged to admit 10,000 Syrian refugees as part of an increased global ceiling for refugee admissions.<sup>20</sup> In the fiscal year 2016, 12,587 have actually been admitted. Since October 2016, the first month of the new fiscal year, an additional 4,000 Syrians were resettled, bringing the total number of Syrians resettled in the USA since the start of the crisis to 16,719.

Worryingly, however, in the past year even this limited progress has been under grave threat from an anti-refugee backlash focused on, but not limited to, Syrians. Concerns about inadequate vetting processes, based largely on misinformation, have led several states to withdraw their cooperation with the US Refugee Resettlement Program – most notably the largest resettlement state, Texas. While NGOs and communities have been able to step up and fill the gap, further withdrawals put increasing pressure on an already under-resourced system.

Even more concerning is that President-Elect Donald Trump has repeatedly said that he would not accept Syrian refugees. Thousands of Syrian refugees are already in the pipeline to be resettled, but the election of Mr Trump has made their fates uncertain. While campaigning, Trump pledged to suspend the refugee resettlement programme until an 'extreme vetting' process could be implemented. The USA already conducts an exceptionally detailed and lengthy security review – with additional steps in place for Syrians – that regularly takes 18 months or more to complete. As such, it is unclear what a heightened review will mean, and whether it will ultimately result in a shutdown of the Syrian

***Fourteen Democratic US Senators (21 May 2015) in letter to President Obama:***

*'We cannot expect countries hosting Syrian refugees to continue shouldering such a disproportionate burden if the United States and other industrialized countries do not begin resettling many more Syrian refugees.'*

resettlement programme, or programmes for other countries considered suspect by the Trump administration. As Governor of Indiana, Vice President-Elect Mike Pence tried to ban the arrival of Syrian refugees to his state in 2016. This action was blocked by a Federal Court in October 2016, but new efforts might be undertaken under the Trump-Pence administration.

While the incoming Trump administration in the USA seems to be on the verge of announcing very disturbing anti-refugee policies, it is worth noting that the USA has a decades-long history of accepting and integrating large numbers of refugees, including hundreds of thousands from Vietnam in the 1980s. According to one survey, the majority of the population thinks that the US government should do more to help refugees.

The US programme is predominantly based on UNHCR's vulnerability criteria. The screening process is, however, incredibly rigorous, as 'refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveller to the United States'.<sup>21</sup> This results in a resettlement process that is very long, regularly more than 18 months (but it can be four or five years, depending on the case).

Although the USA is theoretically able to resettle Syrians from any country in the region, this is limited in practice by the fact that screening interviews must take place in person. This has meant that countries with a larger US presence, such as Turkey and Jordan, have processed the bulk of Syrian refugees. Fewer have come from Iraq, where the US presence is limited for security reasons, and Lebanon, where US security restrictions mean that visiting screeners must stay at the US Embassy in Beirut. This is not large enough to accommodate many screeners on a regular basis.

#### **US: Ahmed Abizaid and his family**

When the war came, tragedy hit Ahmed's family hard. Ahmed's sister was killed by a sniper on her way out of the house to run a quick errand. Then one day on his way to work in Daraa, Syria, Ahmed was shot in the thigh. The pain was so severe that for the first 15 minutes he felt absolutely nothing, but racing through his mind was deep anxiety about what might become of his wife and children. Ahmed and his family fled initially to Jordan to seek safety. His family lived off the little money he had saved, proceeds from the sale of his car, and donations. When he was finally able to move around without crutches, he managed to find some work in Jordan, first as a security guard in a garage and then as cashier in a cafe – both risky undertakings for any Syrian who, like Ahmed, didn't have a permit to work there.

Tall and rail-thin, Ahmed is just 37, but his worn face hints at the hardships he has endured and the worry he now carries for his young family as they strive to build a new life for themselves in a place far from home. He says, 'We feel safe. And what's more important, I'm seeing the order here. The order in America is the best. For example, when I see my children walk to and from school and I'm not worried about them.'

Refugees who are resettled to the USA receive assistance via private resettlement agencies that link the federal government with communities. These agencies are provided with a one-off sum per refugee to assist with meeting expenses, such as rent and food, but also their own operating costs, during their first three months in the USA. The federal Office of Refugee Resettlement

provides longer-term cash and medical assistance, language classes and employment services in the first eight months after arrival.

All refugees must apply to adjust their status to permanent resident after one year. They may apply for citizenship after five years of residence. Refugees can petition for family reunification only with their spouses, parents and unmarried children under 21.

## Canada

|  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| <i>Fair share</i>                                | 15,945 Syrian refugees |
| <i>Actually resettled refugees</i>               | 39,532 Syrian refugees |
| <i>Average waiting time</i>                      | Four to nine months    |
| <i>Adheres to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria</i> | Mostly                 |

Canada is, after the USA, the second largest resettlement country. Upon taking office in late 2015, the new government pledged to bring 25,000 Syrians to Canada by the end of that year, under the government-assisted refugee programme. Under this, the government takes on the full cost of a person's resettlement for one year. Strong political will on refugees has been evident since the 2015 elections, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stating that 'this is not just about welcoming 25,000 Syrian refugees, it's welcoming 25,000 new Canadians'.<sup>22</sup> The deadline for the government to receive and assist these 25,000 people was, however, pushed back to the end of 2016 (though 25,000 Syrians – a combination of publicly and privately sponsored refugees – had been admitted by February 2016). In the past year, Canada has received 19,296 government-assisted refugees and 17,097 privately sponsored and blended visa office-referred refugees, bringing the total number of arrivals to 39,532.<sup>23</sup>

Canada has a longstanding private sponsorship programme, whereby groups of citizens or sponsorship agreement holders (community organizations, faith-related institutions, etc.) commit to sponsor refugee travel to Canada and the first year of integration (for any refugee nationality). Sponsored individuals or families need to meet the definition of refugee (sometimes, though not always, requiring official recognition by UNHCR). Although the process offers an important complement to state-run programmes to increase the intake of refugees, it should continue to be an addition to these programmes, not a substitute.<sup>24</sup> Currently, a total of 18,940 applications (state-led and private sponsorship combined) are being processed, and 4,124 refugee applications have been finalized, but the refugees have not yet travelled to Canada, as of information available on 6 December 2016.

Canada has focused its resettlement programme on Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. In Jordan and Lebanon, the selection process has been conducted through UNHCR, but Canada does not adhere completely to the agency's vulnerability criteria. Women at risk, LGBTI refugees and complete families are given priority as government-sponsored refugees. While providing special protection to these categories is important given their particular vulnerability as refugees, the policy can also be of concern since it may be a mask for addressing perceived security risks. It may de facto exclude at-risk single men from accessing resettlement to Canada. There are no restrictions on single male refugees being privately sponsored to come to Canada.<sup>25</sup> In Turkey,

refugees are selected on similar criteria, but are registered with the Turkish government instead of UNHCR.<sup>26</sup>

Canada has invested heavily in its resettlement programme for Syrian refugees. To process all the applications, the government has deployed a large number of additional staff to visa offices and embassies in the countries neighbouring Syria, with 500 extra personnel at the height of the operation. Due to this 'privileged fast-track regime' for Syrian refugees, the average processing time for government-organized resettlement is four months; for private sponsorship it is nine months.<sup>27</sup> Although it is very positive that the Canadian government has invested so heavily in the Syrian resettlement programme, similar investments should be made for the resettlement of refugees from other countries in the world, where processing times can extend up to several years.

Refugees arriving in Canada through the government resettlement scheme receive a significant amount of support, such as temporary housing, help with finding permanent housing, orientation into the community, help with personal finance and financial support, basic life skills training and referrals to other refugee programmes. This helps them to better integrate into Canadian society. Refugees who have arrived spontaneously do not receive this kind of support, although their need might be just as great. Resettled refugees are permanent residents as soon as they arrive in Canada, with full citizenship taking up to four years to acquire.

Family reunification is possible for permanent residents who want to sponsor their spouse, common-law partner, dependent children or (grand)parents, provided that they can financially support these family members. This can be quite a big hurdle for refugees. Family sponsorship applications can take approximately one year to be processed, although it would take significantly longer for family members in countries affected by the Syrian crisis, because of the significant pressure on visa offices at the moment.<sup>28</sup>

#### United Kingdom<sup>29</sup>

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <i>Fair share</i>                                | 25,056 Syrian refugees   |
| <i>Actually resettled refugees</i>               | 4,414 Syrian refugees    |
| <i>Average waiting time</i>                      | No information available |
| <i>Adheres to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria</i> | Yes                      |

In 2015, the UK government announced that it would resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees before May 2020 as part of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) from all countries neighbouring Syria. In April 2016, it pledged to resettle an additional 3,000 vulnerable refugee children and members of families from the Middle East and North Africa region, a commitment not limited to Syrians.<sup>30</sup> The commitment to resettle Syrians and vulnerable refugee children came in response to public pressure on the government to do more. The UK government did not increase its resettlement commitments again at the UNHCR pledging conference in March 2016 or at the Leaders' Summit on Refugees in September 2016. According to the latest available figures (from 1 December<sup>31</sup>), 4,414 Syrian refugees have been resettled since the VPRS began. The UK has not introduced any other forms of humanitarian admission or expanded any other safe and regular routes for Syrians in neighbouring countries to find safety in the UK. As for spontaneous arrivals, the number of

**Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau** at a UNGA High Level Meeting (19 September 2016):

*'We have a proud history of opening our arms – and our borders – to those most in need, and we look forward to welcoming many more migrants and refugees in the coming years.'*

Syrians who have sought asylum in the UK since the conflict began stands at 10,247.<sup>32</sup>

In a welcome development that responded to public interest in supporting refugees, the UK government has launched a 'community sponsorship scheme', which would enable individuals, charities, faith groups, churches and businesses to support resettled refugees directly by being responsible for welcoming them, providing cultural orientation, housing, English language courses, support towards employment and self-sufficiency.<sup>33</sup> The UK government has said that refugees welcomed via this sponsorship would count towards the commitment to resettle 20,000 refugees and would not be in addition to it. This is problematic as it risks replacing the government's responsibility to fulfil its resettlement pledge.

The process of expanding resettlement capacity has been challenging and initial progress has been slow, but the UK government consistently affirms that the target will be met. However, the government continues to maintain that more help should be given to Syrian refugees who stay in their home region, rather than resettling more to the UK. Prime Minister Theresa May said prior to the UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants in September 2016: 'We have always taken the view that we can help more Syrian refugees by putting aid into the region.'<sup>34</sup> While the UK's support to refugees and host communities in the region is laudable, in reality, there are refugees in the region who need to be resettled because of specific vulnerabilities to abuse, or because they are in need of care that cannot be obtained locally. All the aid in the world would not alter their need for resettlement out of the region.

The VPRS is based on the UNHCR vulnerability criteria, and the UK is entirely relying on UNHCR for refugee referral. Currently, the programme is open to all Syrian refugees registered in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey who meet one or more of UNHCR's criteria for vulnerable groups. As an indication of this, 20 percent of the refugees resettled by the UK have acute medical needs. The majority of those resettled to the UK are family groups of four to six members.

As for family reunification, there are two specific barriers. Firstly, the UK's current family reunion rules are based on a very narrow definition of family. For instance, refugees cannot sponsor a parent or a child over 18. This is not in accordance with the principle of dependency, as advocated by UNHCR. Secondly, there is no legal aid available to support refugees in the UK who ask to be reunited with their families, which, given the complex process, is a real obstacle.

The VPRS is the first in the UK to provide integration support to resettled refugees after their first year in the country. This is different to refugees resettled in the UK under other schemes. Refugees who arrive spontaneously do not receive any dedicated government funding to support their integration. Local authorities can claim support from the local government over the first five years, which is expected to cover (in the first year) and contribute to (in the subsequent years) the costs of providing support. The team responsible for implementing the Syrian VPRS has been allocated money from overseas development assistance (ODA) funding to pay for refugee costs during their first year in the UK. This includes the costs of services from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR, accommodation, healthcare, education, social care, processing of documentation, and caseworking.

Refugees resettled under the VPRS are awarded five years' leave to remain. It is currently expected that they can apply for permanent residence after those five years. Unlike refugees arriving under other resettlement schemes or Syrians arriving spontaneously, resettled Syrians receive complementary protection status rather than refugee status, which affects their ability to access funding for higher education and travel in order to meet family members in Europe.

#### Australia

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <i>Fair share</i>                                | 10,552 Syrian refugees   |
| <i>Actually resettled refugees</i>               | 10,044 Syrian refugees   |
| <i>Average waiting time</i>                      | No information available |
| <i>Adheres to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria</i> | Yes                      |

In September 2015, the Australian government committed to resettle 12,000 Syrians and Iraqis. More than one year into this commitment, just over half this number of refugees have arrived in the country and visas have been granted to just over three quarters. In addition to this commitment, Syrian refugees are also being resettled to Australia through the normal humanitarian intake programme, under which the country currently accepts 13,750 people per year. In 2015/16, 3,202 Syrian and Iraqi refugees arrived under this programme. The arrivals appear to be split almost 50/50 between Syrians and Iraqis.<sup>35</sup> In total between 1 January 2013 and 4 November 2016, 11,147 Syrians were granted visas to resettle; 10,044 Syrians were actually resettled in Australia.

To deliver on the commitment to resettle 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees, the Australian government sent seven additional staff from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to the region and recruited 22 additional locally engaged staff. Refugees are resettled from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey with priority given to those who are highly vulnerable, i.e. persecuted minorities, women, children and families with the least prospect of ever returning safely to their homes. It took several months for people to start arriving in Australia under the additional intake programme, with only 26 having arrived almost five months after the commitment was made, and only 200 having been granted visas. In recent months the numbers have increased steadily. As of October 2016 the average time between the granting of a visa and arrival was less than two months. However, the process before a visa is awarded – with rigorous security, health and character checks – takes a number of months and varies depending on the circumstances of individual applicants.

Syrian refugees are being resettled in cities across Australia. They receive assistance from local settlement services such as information and practical packages including household items. They are also allocated a case worker and are able to access health services, language and employment services, income support payments and schools. They have the same social security entitlements as all other permanent residents, and they are eligible to receive intensive settlement assistance for their first year in Australia. Refugees are able to apply for Australian citizenship after living in Australia for four years.

However, in contrast with its approach to resettlement, Australia has a retrograde and inhumane approach to spontaneous arrivals. Asylum seekers attempting to enter Australia by boat are considered 'unauthorized maritime



arrivals' and are seriously disadvantaged as a result of exercising their right to seek asylum. The Australian government has entered into agreements with the governments of Nauru and Papua New Guinea to process and relocate these asylum seekers; this is called 'offshore processing'.<sup>36</sup> Since 19 July 2013, government policy has been that all asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat are transferred to Nauru and Manus Island.<sup>37</sup> The government has stated that they will never be resettled in Australia.<sup>38</sup> The Australian National Audit Office has reported that the estimated cost per year of holding a person in the offshore processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island is AUD\$573,111 (US\$427,395).

In addition to the agreements with Nauru and Papua New Guinea, the Australian government currently has an agreement with the government of Cambodia, for refugees on Nauru to permanently relocate to Cambodia. To date, six refugees have chosen to relocate to Cambodia but only two have remained there, with the others having decided to return home to Myanmar and Iran, despite having their refugee claims upheld. Further, the Australian government has recently announced an agreement with the United States to resettle refugees currently in regional processing centres. While few details are available, the Prime Minister has stated that priority for resettlement under this agreement will be given to those who are most vulnerable; specifically women, children and families.<sup>39</sup>

The government of Australia has recently proposed legislation to ensure that the refugees on Nauru and Manus Island are never able to come to Australia, regardless of where they are ultimately resettled. The proposed legislation bars anyone who, at the age of 18 years or older, seeks asylum in Australia by sea without authorization, and has been taken to a regional processing country after 19 July 2013, from ever setting foot on Australian soil.<sup>40</sup> This proposed lifetime ban would make family reunification effectively impossible for all those refugees who are currently on Nauru and in Papua New Guinea and who have relatives living in Australia.

## Spain

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <i>Fair share</i>                                | 16,031 Syrian refugees   |
| <i>Actually resettled refugees</i>               | 289 Syrian refugees      |
| <i>Average waiting time</i>                      | No information available |
| <i>Adheres to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria</i> | Yes                      |

At UNHCR's High Level Meeting in March 2016, Spain pledged to resettle 1,449 Syrian refugees within two years. 289 refugees have been resettled to date, almost half of whom had been living in Turkey, via the EU-Turkey deal (which is widely criticized for undermining the spirit of European and international law), and some from Lebanon.<sup>41</sup> On 13 October 2016, the Minister of the Interior announced that of the 1,449 to be resettled, 375 would be Syrian refugees from Lebanon. Although the government has announced that Spain will meet its own overall resettlement goals in full this year, it is unlikely that this will be the case. As for spontaneous arrivals, in the first six months of 2016, Spain recorded 6,875 asylum applications.<sup>42</sup>

Spain adheres to the criteria determined by UNHCR, resettling those refugees who are most in need of protection. Spain has restricted criteria for family

reunification: it is only possible to process requests for reuniting minors and parents, or adults and dependent parents. If any family member does not meet these criteria, e.g. a daughter or son who is 18 years old but still economically dependent, he or she will not be considered. In September 2015 UNHCR requested that Spain facilitate 500 visas for Syrian students from Jordan and Lebanon, but this request was not granted. So far, only 10 visas and scholarships have been granted for Syrian refugee students to Spanish universities, and all of those students were already in Spain.<sup>43</sup> Spain does not have a humanitarian admission programme.

In 2016, the budget for the Directorate General for Domestic Policy increased by 105 percent compared with 2015. This extra funding was intended to reinforce the Asylum and Refugee Office. After the budget increase, it was expected that average application processing times would fall. Applications in Spain take an average of almost three years to process; the slowest of all EU member states.<sup>44</sup> All in all, Spain has allocated more than €200m for refugee care, which indicates that the continuing slowness with which refugees are being resettled is not due to lack of money or infrastructure, but rather appears to be due to a lack of political will.<sup>45</sup>

This lack of political will is all the more disappointing because Spanish people are among the most accepting of refugees worldwide, with 97 percent saying that they would accept people fleeing war and persecution into their country, and 82 percent saying that the Spanish government should do more for refugees.<sup>46</sup> Local initiatives to host refugees and to help them integrate are abundant. Cities across Spain, including Barcelona, Valencia and Madrid, have set up a network of 'Refugee Towns' where residents can sign up to welcome Syrian refugees, with city councils setting aside large sums of money to facilitate the process of integrating them.<sup>47</sup> Many cities and regions have also expressed the need for their national government to increase its resettlement commitment and to lead a common policy of hosting refugees.

Permanent or long-term residence in Spain is provided to anyone who has been granted temporary residence for five years continuously.<sup>48</sup>

## The Netherlands

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| <i>Fair share</i>                                | 7,854 Syrian refugees |
| <i>Actually resettled refugees</i>               | 599 Syrian refugees   |
| <i>Average waiting time</i>                      | Six months            |
| <i>Adheres to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria</i> | Partially             |

Since 1987, the Netherlands has accepted the same number of refugees every year – 500 people – through its resettlement programme. This is regardless of the fact that the number of refugees in the world has dramatically increased. The Netherlands has not made any commitments or pledged to increase that number, or to make specific arrangements for Syrian refugees. Since July 2015, the country has resettled 339 refugees from Lebanon (as of 8 November 2016). It has also resettled refugees from Turkey under the EU-Turkey deal (251 Syrian refugees since April 2016), but this does not target the most vulnerable refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq or Egypt.<sup>49</sup>

There is very little political will in the government to resettle refugees in the

Netherlands, whether from Syria or elsewhere. In 2013, a majority of parliamentarians voted in favour of a motion to resettle 250 Syrian refugees every year on top of the existing quota of 500, but the government argued it should not 'burden Dutch municipalities with the need to find housing for these additional refugees' and decided not to implement this initiative.<sup>50</sup> This lack of political will is in contrast to the willingness of ordinary Dutch citizens: last year, more than 47,000 volunteers registered with two large Dutch refugee NGOs to help with their work of assisting refugees.<sup>51</sup>

In September 2015, the Dutch government informed parliament that the goal for 2016–19 was to resettle 2,000 refugees (500 each year) from Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and stateless Palestinians.<sup>52</sup> When opposition parties or civil society pressure the government to do more to resettle the most vulnerable refugees, the government regularly refers to the number of Syrian (and other) refugees arriving spontaneously in the country (43,000 asylum applications in 2015), claiming that, as such, the Netherlands is already contributing its fair share. These spontaneous arrivals are also the cause of heated debate. For example, the VVD, the biggest party in parliament and a member of the governing coalition, has proposed that asylum seekers spontaneously arriving in Europe should no longer be granted refugee status.<sup>53</sup>

The Dutch government organizes four 'selection missions' each year to consider refugees who have been recommended for resettlement by UNHCR. UNHCR can also submit individual cases through its headquarters in Geneva (these are mainly refugees with a higher profile in the field of human rights, such as human rights campaigners, who are particularly at risk). In addition, the Netherlands has also resettled refugees from UNHCR's Emergency Transit Centre (ETC) in Romania. UNHCR's vulnerability criteria are therefore important, but submissions by UNHCR can be rejected if there are doubts as to whether a refugee would be able to integrate well into Dutch society.<sup>54</sup> The Netherlands sometimes also resettles individuals outside UNHCR's resettlement programme, for example for urgent medical reasons.<sup>55</sup> Through UNHCR, the Netherlands accepts a maximum of 30 people each year who have specific medical needs. It takes approximately six months for a refugee to arrive in the Netherlands after being selected by the Dutch government. Emergency and medical cases can be processed more quickly.

Upon arrival in the Netherlands, resettled refugees have the same access to healthcare, social security and the labour market as Dutch citizens. Most reception and support services are provided by NGOs, who advise local authorities and municipalities, and supervise volunteers who assist resettled refugees with reception and integration. All resettled refugees must take Dutch language classes and a course that teaches basic knowledge about the Netherlands. Refugees have to pay for these courses themselves; those who cannot afford to do so receive a loan, which is turned into a gift if the refugee passes the programme.

Family members of a person who has been granted asylum through the resettlement programme can apply for family reunification within three months of the arrival of the first member of the family in the Netherlands. This counts towards fulfilling the country's annual quota of 500 resettled refugees. Family reunification is possible for spouses, children under 18 and dependants of the

refugee (non-marital partners, parents and adult children). After the three-month period, the regular Dutch criteria for family reunification are applicable, which means that certain income criteria have to be met. However, practice shows that these are difficult to meet for most newly arrived refugees.

## Russia

|  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| <i>Fair share</i>                                | 35,038 Syrian refugees |
| <i>Actually resettled refugees</i>               | 0 Syrian refugees      |
| <i>Average waiting time</i>                      | Not applicable         |
| <i>Adheres to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria</i> | Not applicable         |

Russia has not been a traditional resettlement country for Syrian refugees, although it is a state party to the 1951 Refugee Convention. There is no reason why Russia cannot and should not take on part of the responsibility for hosting refugees, as it is a high-income country. Furthermore, Russia is involved in the Syrian conflict through its direct military intervention on behalf of the Syrian government. The official position of the Kremlin is, however, that the reception of Syrian refugees is 'irrelevant', as countries whose policies contribute to the conflict in Syria should bear the costs of dealing with these refugees – without acknowledging its own significant role.<sup>56</sup> True to this astonishing statement, Russia did not pledge any resettlement places for Syrian refugees at the UNHCR High Level Ministerial Meeting in March 2016. It did commit to providing 300 university scholarships for Syrian students.<sup>57</sup> To date, just two Syrians have received refugee status in Russia.<sup>58</sup>

There are Syrian asylum seekers in Russia, but it is difficult to confirm the exact number. According to a Russian NGO, the Civic Assistance Committee, many Syrians come to the country on work visas or as students and not as asylum seekers.<sup>59</sup> However, when their visas expire, many of them are unable to go back to Syria due to the fear of persecution or other serious human rights violations.

The Civic Assistance Committee estimates that there are currently 8,000 Syrians in legal limbo in Russia, unable to return to Syria and without any legal status in Russia.<sup>60</sup> The risk of *refoulement* is real for these refugees, as was the situation for the three Syrians who took their case to the European Court of Human Rights in 2015. The Court ruled that sending these refugees back to Syria, which Russia was planning to do, would amount to *refoulement*, which is prohibited under the European Convention on Human Rights.<sup>61</sup> Holding these refugees in detention-like centres, which is also common practice in Russia,<sup>62</sup> is also a violation of the Convention.

## Germany

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <i>Fair share</i>                                | 36,854 Syrian refugees   |
| <i>Actually resettled refugees</i>               | 43,570 Syrian refugees   |
| <i>Average waiting time</i>                      | No information available |
| <i>Adheres to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria</i> | Partially                |

Germany has not traditionally been a major resettlement country, but it has received a very large number of Syrian refugees as spontaneous arrivals since 2015. 428,468 were registered in 2015,<sup>63</sup> and 81,547 in 2016. Perhaps as a result of this large movement of refugees, Germany has not made any pledges on resettlement at any of the international conferences in 2016. Within the general UNHCR resettlement programme, Germany committed to receive 1,600 Syrian refugees in 2016–2017, of which 1,091 have been resettled as of 30 November 2016. However, these slots are being used for the 1:1 mechanism under the EU-Turkey deal.<sup>64</sup>

In 2013 the German government announced a first Humanitarian Admission Programme (HAP I), which provided 5,000 places for Syrian refugees. Two more of these programmes have brought the total places offered to 20,000. Between 2013 and 2015, 18,952 refugees arrived in Germany through these programmes. Almost 1,000 admissions are still pending or were being processed in 2016. Overall, the German government has shown considerable political will to take in asylum seekers arriving spontaneously and has taken the lead on this in the EU, raising the bar for other member states.

The HAP schemes have expedited processing and used a range of referral sources, including through UNHCR in Lebanon and Egypt, the NGO Caritas Lebanon, and applications for entry visas at German embassies in the region. Syrian nationals resident in Germany can apply for entry for family members. No missions are organized to the region; instead, interviews are conducted via video calls or telephone. Although the HAPs were initially established to provide only temporary protection for a period of two years, the lack of a foreseeable political solution to the Syrian conflict means that refugees arriving under these programmes will most likely stay longer. As they have the right to apply for an unlimited permit to settle after five years, it can be assumed that many of them will be staying permanently.

Additionally, 15 German federal states have implemented special family reunification schemes since 2013, under which recognized Syrian refugees in Germany can apply for a temporary residence permit on humanitarian grounds for spouses, immediate relatives or members of the wider family, who are currently living in Syria's neighbouring countries. These schemes are based on private sponsorship, as the applicant has to guarantee that he or she has the financial resources to cover living expenses for the other person for up to five years. As of September 2016, 22,216 refugees have arrived through these schemes. However, only four of these schemes are still in place. Furthermore, German authorities are increasingly and systematically exploiting existing legal gaps to reduce family reunification by granting Syrian refugees only subsidiary protection instead of protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention (which would entitle them to family reunification). This must be seen in the context of the large numbers of spontaneous arrivals in Germany and correlates with other

**Angela Merkel,  
German  
Chancellor, on 31  
August 2015:**

*'If Europe fails on the  
question of refugees,  
then it won't be the  
Europe we wished  
for.'*

efforts of the government, starting around the end of 2015, to drastically reduce the numbers of incoming refugees.

It seems that the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, is moving away from her widely praised 'welcome culture' towards a more restrictive approach aiming at 'noticeably and permanently' reducing the number of refugees.<sup>65</sup> Refugees (except beneficiaries of private sponsorship schemes) are entitled to take part in integration courses, and social workers are provided to help resettled refugees with housing, jobs, interactions with the government and other aspects of their daily lives. Resettled refugees can also immediately pursue any kind of paid employment. Refugees who are resettled are granted temporary residency of three years, which is renewable on an annual basis. Permanent residency can normally be applied for after five years of legal residency.



### 3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Oxfam's view, it is clearly possible – and indeed vital – for states to agree to a concrete mechanism for equitably sharing the responsibility for refugees. The private initiatives and the will of so many citizens all over the world to help refugees from Syria, including in countries where the government has not been willing to resettle them, are inspiring. That is why, to make sure that states uphold refugees' rights and meet their commitments in 2017, Oxfam has formulated the following 11 recommendations and practical measures to promote the resettlement or other forms of humanitarian admission of at least 10 percent of refugees from Syria, drawing on the case studies discussed in this paper.

#### ACHIEVING AT LEAST 10 PERCENT RESETTLEMENT AND OTHER FORMS OF ADMISSION

- **Political and civic leaders should show political will and leadership**

Government officials should be transparent and open to the complexities of resettling refugees, while also countering the discourse of fear and xenophobia at all times. Political leaders should make statements in support of refugees, and actively challenge the myths that surround people who are in need of protection.

- **Rich countries should at least commit to resettle their fair share of 10 percent of the Syrian refugees in countries neighbouring Syria by the end of 2017.**

Even if rich countries honour their existing pledges, the number of refugees actually resettled will be a fraction compared with the numbers hosted by Syria's neighbours, and far less than the number of those in need of resettlement. Rich countries should honour their pledges and then commit to taking in more vulnerable refugees, showing Syria's neighbours that they are not the only ones who have to take on responsibility for welcoming, protecting and hosting Syrian refugees.

- **Governments should match local willingness with action themselves**

National governments should tap into and respond to the multitude of grassroots initiatives by individual citizens, civil society organizations, religious institutions, schools and businesses, whereby people are opening their homes and their hearts to Syrian refugees. Governments should work with these groups and initiatives to explore ways to help newly resettled refugees adapt to their new country.

- **Resettlement countries should adhere to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria**

Countries should use UNHCR's vulnerability criteria to select refugees for resettlement. Governments should refrain from focusing on just a few of these criteria (such as age or gender) or add additional ones, as this can result in exclusion or an extra hurdle for refugees who are already at risk.

- **Countries should expedite resettlement for refugees facing urgent risks**

Countries should prioritize resettling refugees who are at immediate risk because they are threatened with *refoulement* or whose physical safety is threatened in the country of first asylum.

- **Governments should consider introducing private sponsorship models**

Governments should allow and support private sponsorship models in countries that currently have none. This would be an important step in providing incentives for cross-geographical solidarity among individuals and citizen groups. Such programmes should, however, be in addition to government-assisted resettlement, and ensure that refugees' rights and interests are central to the programme.

- **Receiving countries should address obstacles in countries neighbouring Syria, including taking measures to resettle vulnerable refugees who are unable to register with UNHCR.**

Countries with resettlement programmes should work with local organizations and others involved in community-based protection to identify and consider refugees for resettlement. This is particularly important given that some refugees are now unable to register with UNHCR, causing increased refugee vulnerability.

## AND BEYOND

- **Countries should adhere to the principle of dependency in family reunification and ensure that the process to apply for a family member to reunite with relatives is efficient, expedient and non-conditional**

Countries should apply a broad definition of a family unit, adhering to the principle of dependency, under which the criteria for family reunification are flexible and expansive, as well as culturally sensitive and situation-specific.<sup>66</sup>

- **States must respect the rights of asylum seekers who arrive spontaneously**

Countries should abandon punitive deterrent mechanisms in dealing with refugees arriving spontaneously, such as prolonged detention, relocating asylum seekers, and prohibiting refugees from setting foot on their territory again.

- **Donors should fund UNHCR's application processing activities**

States should financially support UNHCR to process applications for the 10 percent of Syrian refugees who will require resettlement submissions in 2017.<sup>67</sup>

- **Non-traditional resettlement countries should increase their intake of refugees, while guaranteeing their rights in line with the UN Refugee Convention**

Many rich countries in the region, such as the Gulf states of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain, although they have yet to sign up to the 1951 Refugee Convention, should afford the large numbers of Syrians they are hosting as 'guests' all the rights that refugees are entitled to. These include ensuring access to education and healthcare, and protection from *refoulement*.

## APPENDIX 1

Oxfam has evaluated the process of resettling Syrian refugees by looking at five criteria:

### **1. Political commitment to help refugees**

A key aspect is having the political will to help and resettle Syrian refugees in the first place. The case studies look at the pledges made for resettlement or other forms of humanitarian admission of refugees, and also at the general discourse regarding refugees in specific countries.

### **2. Resettlement criteria**

UNHCR has formulated vulnerability criteria in order to distinguish which refugees are most at risk and in need of resettlement. Oxfam has examined whether states adhere to these criteria or whether they have chosen to single out Syrian refugees based on other, non-vulnerability-driven criteria. It also looks at other means of admission for Syrian refugees within these eight states.

### **3. Security checks**

Refugees being offered resettlement undergo a very thorough screening process, often at different stages in the process. The case studies evaluate whether some countries have a more restrictive screening process than others.

### **4. Investment in capacity, staff and facilities**

Considering the large number of Syrian refugees who are in need of resettlement, the admission process needs to be as expeditious as possible. In order to achieve that, states must make sufficient funds available (as well as staff and facilities) for in-country screening, medical reviews, conducting resettlement interviews, coordination with UNHCR and the IOM and cultural orientation.

### **5. Reception conditions**

Resettlement does not end when refugees set foot in their new country. They are often severely traumatized and/or survivors of serious human rights abuses, for which they need support. It is also important to focus on the preparedness of states to welcome resettled refugees and the quality of their integration programmes. For this last criterion, Oxfam has focused on the kind of programmes that countries have (at national and local government level, and also civil society) to help newly resettled refugees on their way.

## NOTES

- 1 UNHCR and Government of Turkey (2016). Syria Regional Refugee Response. *Total Persons of Concern: 4,798,574 (last updated 23 October 2016)*. In Lebanon, in May 2015, at the instruction of the government, UNHCR Lebanon temporarily suspended new registrations. In addition, the government ordered the de-registration of all Syrians registered after 5 January 2015. Accordingly, individuals arriving after 5 January 2015 are still waiting to be registered and are not included in the 1,017,433 of Syrians registered by UNHCR. However, in practice, individuals are able to approach UNHCR and make themselves known (recorded). Recording does not give the same access to assistance and resettlement as registration. The Government of Lebanon estimates the total number of Syrians in the country to be 1.5 million.
- 2 This is by no means a new phenomenon, neither is it limited to refugee-hosting countries in the Middle East. See also B. Frelick (1994). *The Year in Review*, World Refugee Survey, pp.14–19. In a rare case of straightforwardness, Kenyan government officials said that if the EU can close its doors to Syrian refugees, then Kenya could close its doors to Somali refugees. See Oxfam Media Briefing (2016). *A Poor Welcome from the World's Wealthy*, p.2. [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/mb-a-poor-welcome-refugees-180716-en\\_0.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/mb-a-poor-welcome-refugees-180716-en_0.pdf)
- 3 Oxfam (2016). *Resettling 10 Percent of Syrian Refugees: The commitment needed at the Geneva Conference*. <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/resettling-10-percent-of-syrian-refugees-the-commitment-needed-at-the-geneva-co-603540>
- 4 UNHCR (2016). *UNHCR: 1 in 10 Syrian refugees will need resettling*. <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/3/56fa71f39/unhcr-1-10-syrian-refugees-need-resettling.html>
- 5 These countries are members of the OECD DAC group and have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention. Russia is added; although not a member of the OECD DAC, it is a signatory to the 1951 Convention and is intimately involved in the crisis in Syria.
- 6 UNGA (2016). *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*, A/71/L.1 paras 77–79 and White House Office of the Press Secretary (2016). *Fact Sheet on the Leaders' Summit on Refugees* (20 September).
- 7 *The Daily Star, Lebanon* (2015). *Europe Not Sharing Refugee Burden: Bassil*. 25 September. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Sep-25/316556-europe-not-sharing-refugee-burden-bassil.ashx>
- 8 Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam International and Save the Children (2016). *From Words to Action. Reviewing the Commitments Made at the 'Supporting Syria and the Region' Conference Six Months On*.
- 9 The EU-Lebanon Association Council, Decision No 1/2016 of the EU-Lebanon Association Council agreeing on EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities 2016 (UE-RL 3001/16), Annex 3. The other two durable solutions are local integration and repatriation.
- 10 This is by no means a new phenomenon, neither is it limited to refugee-hosting countries in the Middle East. See also B. Frelick (1994). *The Year in Review*, World Refugee Survey, pp.14–19. In a rare case of straightforwardness, Kenyan government officials said that if the EU can close its doors to Syrian refugees, then Kenya could close its doors to Somali refugees. See Oxfam Media Briefing (2016). *A Poor Welcome from the World's Wealthy*, p.2. [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/mb-a-poor-welcome-refugees-180716-en\\_0.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/mb-a-poor-welcome-refugees-180716-en_0.pdf)
- 11 This figure may include Syrian refugees resettled to the EU and Norway under the 1:1 resettlement scheme in the EU-Turkey agreement, which Oxfam was not able to verify. Oxfam believes that these resettlement commitments are part of a deal under which European governments seek to absolve themselves of the responsibility of accepting and processing spontaneous asylum applications at their border and thereby undermines people's right to claim asylum in Europe.
- 12 Information drawn from publicly available sources as of 6 December 2016, including UNHCR, and checked with government sources where possible.
- 13 In addition to this figure, Ireland has also resettled 101 refugees of non-Syrian nationality who have been displaced by the Syria conflict.
- 14 Oxfam (2016). *A Poor Welcome from the World's Wealthy*, op. cit.
- 15 See, for example, UNHCR's *Executive Committee Conclusion* No. 109 (LX) – 2009 (para. i) and UNGA (2016). *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*, A/71/L.1, para 78.
- 16 UNHCR (2016). *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2017*, p.17.
- 17 UNHCR (2001). *Background Note for the Agenda Item: Family Reunification in the Context of Resettlement and Integration*, pp.1-2. The principle of dependency means that the criteria for family reunification are flexible and expansive, and that they are culturally sensitive and situation-specific.
- 18 Oxfam (2016). *Resettling 10 Percent of Syrian Refugees*, op. cit., p.8.

- 19 Since resettlement processes in some countries are quite opaque, this report does not mention all of these five features for every case study.
- 20 The US Refugee Resettlement Program operates on an October–September fiscal year.
- 21 The White House (2015). Infographic: *The Screening Process for Refugee Entry into the United States*. whitehouse.gov, 20 November 2015.  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states> (accessed 11 November 2016)
- 22 Justin Trudeau, CBC Metro Morning, 24 November 2015.  
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/programs/metromorning/justin-trudeau-interview-refugees-1.3333632>
- 23 Government of Canada (2016). #WelcomeRefugees: Key figures.  
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/ENGLISH/REFUGEES/WELCOME/MILESTONES.ASP>
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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email [advocacy@oxfaminternational.org](mailto:advocacy@oxfaminternational.org)

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