

*Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.)*

# Escaping the Escape

Toward Solutions for the Humanitarian Migration Crisis



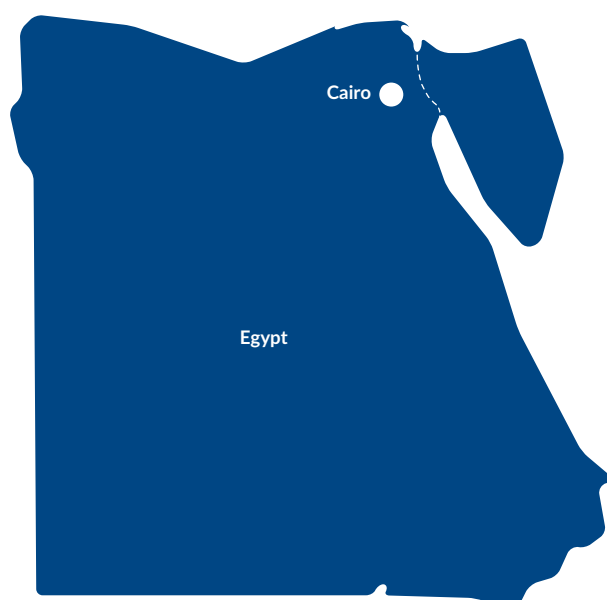
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# Human Mobility in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: The Case of Egypt

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<http://www.bti-project.org/egy>

## Human Mobility in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: The Case of Egypt

Basic facts	Egypt
Capital	Cairo
<b>Demographics</b>	
Population	91.51 million
Annual population growth rate	2.1%
Net migration rate (2016 est.)	-0.5 migrant(s)/1,000 population
Top destination countries (2013)	Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, the United States of America, Qatar, Italy, Lebanon, Bahrain, Canada
Top source countries (2013)	Syria, West Bank and Gaza, Somalia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Republic of Yemen, Libya, Jordan, Sudan, Indonesia
Ethnic groups	Egyptian 99.6%, other 0.4% (2006)
Languages	Arabic (official), English and French widely understood by educated classes
Religions and beliefs	Muslim (predominantly Sunni) 90%, Christian (majority Coptic Orthodox, other Christians include Armenian Apostolic, Catholic, Maronite, Orthodox and Anglican) 10% (2012 est.)
Median age (2016 est.)	23.8 years
<b>Economy and employment</b>	
GDP, PPP / GDP per capita, PPP	\$ 996.638 billion / \$ 10,891.3
GDP growth rate	4.2%
GNI, PPP / GNI per capita, PPP	\$ 978.332 billion / \$ 10,690
Inflation rate (consumer prices)	10.4%
Unemployment (%) (2014)	13.2% (2014)
Youth (15-24 years) unemployment (2014)	42% (2014)
FDI inflows	\$ 6.885 billion
Imports of goods and services	\$ 73.675 billion (2014)
Exports of goods and services	\$ 47.101 billion (2014)
Remittances inward flow	\$ 20.391 billion
Political transformation (BTI 2016)	3.93 (rank 91 out of 129 countries)
Economic transformation (BTI 2016)	4.86 (rank 83 out of 129 countries)

Note: All figures for 2015 unless otherwise specified. Sources (in alphabetical order): Bertelsmann Transformation Index BTI, CIA World Factbook, Eurostat, UNCTAD, UN Data, World Bank (for details, see "A Note from the Editors").

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in March 2011, more than 100,000 Syrian refugees have arrived in Egypt, posing a variety of challenges to the country. In addition, growing numbers of people from countries such as Sudan have also arrived in Egypt, prompting an urgent need to limit and monitor the flows of irregular migration into the country.

## Reasons for flight: Policy failures, conflicts and war

Although the refugee crisis has evolved at a speed making it increasingly difficult to procure timely and comprehensive statistics, an attempt to quantify the situation is given below.

### 1. Syrian refugees in Egypt

Egypt is neither a direct neighbor to Syria nor a major regional destination for Syrian refugees. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 117,702 registered Syrian refugees, or about 41,000 households, in Egypt as of 31 May 2016 (UNHCR 2016a). As this figure reflects only registered refugees, Egypt's total population of resident Syrians may be larger. This population of registered refugees comprises just 2.43 percent of the total number of Syrian refugees worldwide.

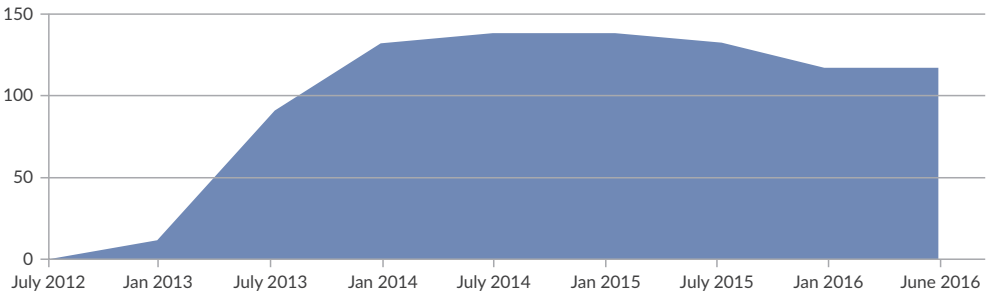
An examination of changes in the Syrian refugee population in Egypt shows a trend of significant increase, from fewer than 1,000 individuals in July 2012 to more than 138,000 in January 2015. However, as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1 below, the total number of Syrian refugees in Egypt subsequently decreased to about 118,000 in January 2016. This suggests that about 20,000 Syrian refugees presumably either left the country or otherwise fell off the registration rolls in 2015.

**Table 1: Registered Syrian refugees in Egypt, 2012–2016**

Date	Number of registered refugees	Absolute change
July 2012	924	---
Jan 2013	13,001	12,077
July 2013	88,960	75,959
Jan 2014	131,599	42,639
July 2014	138,159	6,560
Jan 2015	138,212	53
July 2015	132,375	-5,837
Jan 2016	117,658	-14,717
June 2016	117,702	44

Source: UNHCR 2016a

Figure 1: Registered Syrian refugees in Egypt, 2012–2016 (in thousands)



Source: UNHCR 2016a

Government figures on Syrians in Egypt differ from UNHCR statistics. In January 2016, Egypt’s minister of foreign affairs claimed that the country was hosting 300,000 Syrians.

## 2. Other refugee populations in Egypt

Although Syrians comprise the vast majority of refugees in Egypt, the country also hosts more than 60,000 refugees of other nationalities. Again, as these figures reflect only registered refugees, the total number of residents holding foreign citizenship may be larger. Sudanese citizens, who constitute the largest single-country share within this group, do not need a visa to enter Egypt and are guaranteed the freedoms of movement, residence, work and property by the Four Freedoms Agreement signed between Egypt and Sudan in 2004, which grants Sudanese in Egypt a status close to that of nationals (Roman 2006).

Table 2: Registered non-Syrian refugees in Egypt

Country of origin	Number of registered refugees
Sudan	28,132
Iraq	6,987
Ethiopia	6,733
Somalia	6,332
South Sudan	4,168
Eritrea	3,633
Nigeria	1,830
Yemen	1,375
Other nationalities	1,021
<b>Total</b>	<b>60,211</b>

Source: UNHCR 2016b: 2



### 3. Egyptians in Europe

According to Egyptian government estimates, there are between 7 and 8 million Egyptians living abroad. The United Nations' estimate of this population, at 3.3 million individuals as of 2015, is considerably lower (UNDESA 2015). More than two-thirds of Egyptian migrants go to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries of Jordan and Libya. As these countries do not allow naturalization and classify migrants as contractual laborers, Egyptians who migrate to these destinations are expected to return home eventually. However, thousands also leave the country each year with the intention of permanently resettling in Europe, Australia or North America (Zohry 2006a).

The current stream of irregular migration from Egypt to Europe started on the eve of the 21st century, as massive numbers of new graduates and poorly educated, unemployed youths sought to reach Europe either by crossing the Mediterranean

**Table 3: Remittances from Egyptians abroad by country/region, 2015**

Country/region	Remittances (USD)	Share of total remittances to Egypt (%)
<b>Arab countries</b>		
Saudi Arabia	7,587,164	38.5
Kuwait	3,213,443	16.3
United Arab Emirates	1,872,915	9.5
Jordan	1,293,411	6.6
Qatar	1,056,981	5.4
Lebanon	502,060	2.5
Bahrain	359,835	1.8
Oman	224,939	1.1
Libya	100,001	0.5
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>16,210,750</b>	<b>82.2</b>
<b>USA, Canada &amp; Australia</b>		
United States	1,012,819	5.1
Canada	265,374	1.3
Australia	246,756	1.3
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,524,949</b>	<b>7.7</b>
<b>Europe</b>		
Italy	556,758	2.8
France	167,971	0.9
United Kingdom	166,296	0.8
Germany	108,175	0.5
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>999,199</b>	<b>5.1</b>
<b>Other countries</b>	<b>975,000</b>	<b>4.9</b>
<b>World</b>	<b>19,710,226</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: World Bank 2016



Sea – embarking from Libya at first, but more recently from Egypt’s northern coast – or by overstaying tourist Schengen visas. This new type of migration was primarily driven not by tightened European migration policies, but rather by the high unemployment rates among young Egyptians. This population was additionally motivated by difficulties experienced in finding employment in the Gulf States due to increasing competition from Southeast Asian workers migrating to the same destinations, as well as by Egypt’s geographical proximity to Europe.

As indicated above in Table 3, remittances sent home by Egyptians abroad totaled \$19.7 million in 2015. More than 80 percent (\$16.2 million) of these remittances originated from Arab countries, followed by remittances (totaling \$1.5 million) from the United States, Canada and Australia. Remittances to Egypt by Egyptians in Europe amounted to just \$1 million, or 4.9 percent of total remittances flowing to Egypt in 2015. Egyptians in Italy accounted for more than 50 percent of the remittances from Egyptians in Europe, followed by compatriots in France and the United Kingdom (about 17% each) and then Germany (approx. 11%).

The totals presented in the table above include only formal remittances transmitted through formal channels. However, informal remittances are prevalent particularly in Libya, Italy and France, as most Egyptian migrants in these countries are engaged in the informal sector as irregular migrants, with no fixed salaries or bank accounts (Zohry 2014). Remittances through formal channels are available only to those with legal status. It is natural to conclude that irregular migrants in these countries also annually send back to Egypt sums ranging from several hundred to several thousand dollars or euros.

### Factors driving migration from Egypt

Before discussing means of controlling, limiting or preventing flows of irregular migrants, it is important to distinguish between different factors influencing refugees’ decisions to leave a country in which they have initially sought shelter (Egypt) and head instead to a third country – usually in Europe – in the case of Syrian refugees in Egypt. These factors can be classified into two categories: those related to the current host country (Egypt), and those related to the potential destination country in Europe.

#### 1. Factors related to the current country of residence (push factors)

Six primary push factors can be regarded as driving Syrians in Egypt to consider leaving for another destination. A brief description of these factors is given below:

- *High cost of living:* The cost of living for Syrian refugees in Egypt is high in comparison to their income, which is typically composed of assistance from UNHCR

and humanitarian foundations as well as payment for work in the informal sector. Syrian families in Egypt thus struggle to pay rent, feed their families and cover basic needs.

- *Limited work opportunities:* Egypt acceded to the U.N.'s 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, but it made reservations exempting it from Articles 12(1), 20, 22(1), 23 and 24. These articles guarantee refugees treatment equivalent to that of nationals with regard to personal-status laws, social services, housing, education, social security and welfare, and some labor laws (UN 2016). For this reason, refugees' labor market access in Egypt is restricted, especially in the formal sector. In practice, Syrian refugees often work in the informal economy as semi-skilled or skilled labor. Joining the formal sector is almost impossible for Syrian refugees, as it requires their potential employers to obtain work permits from the Ministry of Labor confirming that the national labor force is unable to meet their job requirements (Ayoub and Khallaf 2014).
- *Limited education opportunities:* Although the Egyptian government accords Syrians the same rights as Egyptians with respect to education in the state-funded education system, Syrian pupils face difficulties integrating with their Egyptian peers. To overcome this issue, Syrians have established informal schools in parallel, where Syrian teachers follow the Egyptian curriculum. Moreover, Egypt's overpopulation problem undermines the quality of education. As a result, many Syrians residing in the country do not see the school system as performing at a satisfactory level.
- *Limited health services:* Despite Egypt's reservations to the 1951 convention, Syrian refugees in Egypt are granted full access to public health care services. Nevertheless, the availability of free health services is limited. For major operations and expensive health interventions, Syrians – like Egyptians – must pay for the services using their own income or savings, or search for a sponsor.
- *Absence of naturalization opportunities:* Egypt lacks mechanisms by which Syrian refugees might be naturalized. This means that the only stable, long-term solutions that Egypt offers to Syrian refugees are voluntary repatriation or resettlement to a third country.
- *Loss of hope and unclear future:* With Syria's crisis now in its sixth year (as of the time of writing) and no sign of a solution in sight, hope is dwindling among Syrian refugees in Egypt. This loss of optimism and the lack of future clarity regarding the situation in Syria make Syrians' lives in Egypt more difficult.

## 2. Factors related to target countries in Europe (pull factors)

Pull factors are related to the potential destination country in Europe. They work like magnets, attracting refugees to such countries. In fact, pull factors often serve as the reverse of the push factors mentioned above. Syrians in Egypt heading to Europe are

aware of that continent's better living conditions as compared to Egypt's. Reaching Europe, they expect a better quality of life, better health services, better education opportunities for their children, and better ways of integrating into the labor market than are available in Egypt. With the loss of hope in a short- or medium-term solution for Syria itself, Syrians heading to Europe see a genuine opportunity for naturalization, an option that is not available in Egypt.

### Migration networks

In addition to the push and pull factors stated above, migration networks help smooth the migration process and facilitate immigration streams between origin and destination countries (Haug 2008). With a long tradition of Syrian migration to Europe (especially to France and Germany) as well as the new flows that have emerged in the wake of the Syrian crisis, migration networks represent an important factor stimulating and maintaining the migration of Syrians to Europe.

To some extent, such push factors also apply to other refugee populations in Egypt. However, because Syrians comprise the vast majority of refugees in Egypt, this analysis focuses more specifically on them.

### Means of controlling, limiting or preventing irregular migrant flows

Irregular migration, including human trafficking, is a concern for the Egyptian state. The country has employed three primary mechanisms in its efforts to combat such migration: 1) security and border-control measures; 2) legal and legislative measures; and 3) information-dissemination and awareness-raising programs.

#### 1. Security and border-control measures

Despite the political unrest that has marked the last five years, Egypt has managed to restore a significant degree of control over its borders, thus acting to combat the smuggling of arms, drugs and migrants. In mid-2016, Egyptian border guards foiled major people-smuggling operations on the Mediterranean. In addition to the border guards' work, the Ministry of Interior has continued efforts to track and eliminate migrant-smuggling networks.

The fragile political and security situation in Libya following the collapse of the Gadhafi regime in February 2011 has resulted in an eastwards shift of the departure point for boats carrying irregular migrants, primarily to the Egyptian coastal governorate of Matrouh and the cities of Alexandria and Kafr El-Sheikh. This has added at least 1,000 kilometers to the journey to Italy, rendering it more hazardous than before.

## 2. Legal and legislative measures

In 2002, Egypt ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, which focuses particularly on women and children, as well as the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. In addition, the EU-Egypt Association Agreement of 2004 calls for cooperation in the area of preventing and controlling illegal migration.

The National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration (NCCPIM) serves as a central clearinghouse for the government's anti-illegal-immigration policies and other related efforts. It coordinates the actions of the governmental entities represented in it, as well as those of other non-governmental actors, and acts as an advisory body to various national agencies and authorities. As a means of complying with Egypt's international obligations, and particularly as an important step toward transposing the terms of the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants into national law, the NCCPIM recently prepared a draft of a new law aimed at combating irregular migration and migrant-smuggling. The Cabinet of Ministers approved the draft law in November 2015, and the parliament was expected to pass the finalized measure before the end of 2016.

The law's provisions call for prison terms and substantial fines for smugglers and their accomplices. If the smuggling results in the death or disability of migrant women or children, or if links to organized crime and terrorism can be substantiated, life prison sentences and fines above \$ 25,000 are specified.

## 3. Information-dissemination and awareness-raising programs

Public awareness campaigns focusing specifically on migration started comparatively early in Egypt with the launch of the Information Dissemination for the Prevention of Irregular Migration (IDOM) project in 2006, funded by Italy's development-cooperation agency (Zohry 2006b). The project sought to influence the choices of potential Egyptian migrants through the provision of information, thus helping them gain a better understanding of migration realities. A mass information campaign addressing multiple aspects related to irregular migration (legal, socio-economic, etc.) was implemented through this project, combining various media and utilizing the participation of NGOs and youth groups.

Media campaigns and programs continued after the end of the IDOM project. The issue of irregular migration gained more attention especially after the foundation of the NCCPIM in March 2014. However, these media campaigns have been aimed at Egyptian nationals and not at Syrians or other nationalities.

### Key lessons learned

Compared to other countries in the region, such as Lebanon and Jordan, Egypt has been minimally affected by the influx of Syrians. Even using the government's high-end estimate of Syrians in Egypt (300,000), they comprise only about 0.3 percent of the country's total population (an estimated 91 million as of July 2016). Moreover, ever since a wave of Syrian migration to Egypt in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, Syrians have been perceived by Egyptians as skilled craftsmen and committed professionals. Hence, Syrians are more readily accepted in Egypt than many other nationalities.

In addition, Syrians in Egypt are relatively well integrated into the labor market as compared to refugees from sub-Saharan Africa. While the vast majority of sub-Saharan African refugees work in semi-skilled jobs, a significant percentage of Syrians work as highly skilled professionals in all fields of the economy. Unlike sub-Saharan African refugees, Syrians also have no language barrier, as they speak the same native language as Egyptians.

The work of UNHCR and other international and regional organizations to assist Syrians in Egypt has no doubt helped improve this population's living conditions. However, the most important factor in bettering their situation has been this: Instead of waiting for aid from such organizations, Syrian refugees have actively sought to join the informal economy and compete in order to build lives in the country. Hence, the main source of income for many Syrian families residing in Egypt is work rather than aid. Their reputation as experienced entrepreneurs and professional workers, especially in the food industry, has helped them carve out a niche in the Egyptian economy more successfully than other refugee groups.

However, Syrians in Egypt generally lack access to financial services. Moreover, they are unable to participate in training or job-preparation programs. They are thus forced to depend on whatever skills they previously derived from their experience in their home country. Despite these difficulties, they have shown a strong ability and tendency to integrate into the local labor market.

### Future scenarios

Given the current economic, political and security conditions in Egypt and the Middle East and North African (MENA) region, the following three short- to medium-term scenarios for irregular migration and refugee flows across the Mediterranean are possible.

#### Escalating migration (negative change)

If conditions in Syria and its neighboring refugee-host countries deteriorate, a negative scenario of escalation can be expected to occur. Such deterioration may prompt

a share of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) now in Syria to move to neighboring countries. Syrians in neighboring countries may be motivated by local push factors to relocate or migrate further, either to a less saturated country (e.g., Egypt) or to Europe. Any negative economic or political change in Egypt, including any political or economic repression of non-Egyptians, would likely drive thousands of Syrians to leave the country. Since they cannot go back to Syria, many of those leaving Egypt would likely head to Europe. The only two flight paths available for refugees in Egypt are via the northern coasts of Egypt and Libya. In mid-2016, a number of attempts to escape Egypt via these paths were reported (Rollins and al-Kashef 2016).

This scenario would likely lead the European Union to put more pressure on Egypt to abide by its commitment to cooperate on anti-irregular-migration issues, as stated in the Egypt-EU Association Agreement. In addition, it could exacerbate the problems faced by the Egyptian government in this transitional period.

### **Steady state (the middle way)**

Under the steady-state or middle-way scenario, the volume of irregular migration flows from the eastern Mediterranean region to Europe would remain relatively constant through the foreseeable future. Under this scenario, a few thousand Syrians in Egypt would leave to join their compatriots in Europe every year. As other factors would likewise remain essentially unchanged, this scenario would mean the preservation of a prolonged status quo for Egypt.

### **Decreasing migration (positive change)**

The decreasing-migration or positive-change scenario assumes decreasing flows of refugees from Syria to neighboring countries as well as a decline in secondary migration by Syrian refugees toward Europe and elsewhere. This scenario would be dependent on major and ultimately successful efforts to resolve the Syrian conflict, thus giving IDPs and Syrian refugees in neighboring countries the option of returning to their origin country (voluntary repatriation). This scenario by no means entails an end to irregular migration or the disappearance of dreams of resettlement in Europe, but it would mean a decline in migration flows. It is important to recall that migration to Europe remains a goal for a significant proportion of the population in developing countries, especially youth, even in the absence of crises like the Syrian conflict.

This scenario would also be likely to lead to better relations between Egypt and the European Union, which could in turn produce closer cooperation on issues such as technical assistance in fighting irregular migration.

### Actions and recommendations

As they seek to manage and moderate migrant flows across the eastern Mediterranean, EU institutions and member states should consider the recommendations noted below.

#### EU institutions

With migrant flows shifting overwhelmingly to the eastern Mediterranean, the European Union struck an agreement with Turkey in March 2016 to halt the movement of migrants and refugees traveling across the Aegean from Turkey to the Greek islands in exchange for increased financial support, visa liberalization and other inducements. In the future, European politicians and policymakers should ensure that they adhere to European values in dealing with the Syrian issue and Syrian refugees entering Europe. The world is closely watching how Europe handles the Syrian refugee crisis. The EU-Turkey agreement arguably contravened traditional European values in some respects, and will thus have future consequences for the global image of Europe and the European Union.

With respect to cooperation between Egypt and the EU in combating irregular migration, the Egypt-EU Association Agreement includes articles on migration (e.g., 63, 68, 70 and 72). The agreement thus serves as a basis for cooperation, but bilateral cooperation also needs to be strengthened, especially with the primary destination countries for Syrians in Europe.

#### EU member states

Bilateral relations are better suited for tackling issues and dealing with the challenges of irregular migration than are higher-level organizations and regional arrangements. EU member states should make a greater effort to help host countries support the burden of hosting Syrian refugees by engaging in direct contact with host countries in the region, including Egypt.

In the case of Egypt, EU member states should look for effective ways to help address the unmet needs of Syrians in Egypt, thus reducing push factors and migration pressure on Europe. Aside from political efforts to resolve the Syrian conflict, EU member states should pursue the following specific interventions through bilateral arrangements under the auspices of the Egypt-EU Association Agreements:

- work through the government of Egypt to provide support to local, regional and international governmental and non-governmental organizations in their efforts to aid Syrians in Egypt;



- help establish job-training or vocational education programs for Syrians in Egypt, enabling them to improve their access to the labor market;
- work with NGOs to help Syrians in Egypt gain access to the financial services allowable under national regulations, perhaps by funding microcredit programs tailored to this community;
- work with the government and private organizations to create a health insurance program and sufficient health care services for Syrians in Egypt;
- work with the government to develop programs enabling Syrians in Egypt to integrate into the national education system, in part by providing counseling and training to Egyptian educators to enable them to deal with diversity; and
- work with the Egyptian government to create public information programs supporting the value of diversity and the need to accept non-nationals, while also raising awareness on issues relating to refugees, the protection of foreign workers and human rights.

As EU governments seek to carry out these and similar interventions, it is critical to work under the overall umbrella of the Egypt-EU Association Agreement and other existing bilateral agreements. For example, bilateral cooperation between Egypt and Italy in the field of migration has been quite successful and can serve as a model for other such relationships. The German-Egyptian agreement is also exemplary.

Since NGOs have been a sensitive issue for the Egyptian government due to their perceived negative role in the period following the revolution of 25 January 2011, the work of such organizations should be coordinated with the state beforehand. The involvement of highly reputable organizations, such as Germany's government-owned international cooperation company, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), will be an asset.

### Three guiding ideas

Below, we identify three central ideas that – if acted upon – may help reduce the flow of Syrians to Europe from their current countries of refuge:

First, keeping Syrian refugees where they are is considerably cheaper than admitting them into Europe. Thus, Europe should help refugee-host countries in the Middle East and North Africa create decent living conditions for Syrian and other refugees, sharing the financial burdens of hosting these populations in the region.

Second, as they seek to manage the flows of Syrian refugees, EU member states should in the future avoid compromising so-called European values, as critics assert was done with the March 2016 EU-Turkey agreement.

Finally, the key to settling the Syrian refugee crisis lies in addressing the root cause of this upheaval: the political conflict in Syria itself. No permanent solution with regard to resettlement of refugees and IDPs is possible without first resolving this political conflict. No matter how much aid and sympathy flows to this massive

displaced population, the current situation is catastrophic, and the resources devoted to humanitarian aid are not enough.

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