The border policies of Syria’s neighbouring countries have fluctuated recently over the past year due to the security situation, political developments and the increasing number of refugees. This has caused uncertainty among those trying to flee and international responders. Some people trying to leave have been trapped inside Syria due to border restrictions, and at the border with Turkey this has led to the establishment of several IDP camps.

Given the various restrictions imposed by the governments of neighbouring countries, irregular and unregulated movement of refugees across borders is reported to be widespread. The legal status and rights of individuals exiting Syria may be compromised when they enter a country via an unofficial crossing.

Movements across borders also involve the smuggling of goods (food, fuel, medicines etc.), weapons and the movement of armed personnel.

Widespread information gaps persist in relation to border areas. The limited access of humanitarian organisations to border areas and scarcity of information hampers understanding of the situation on the ground and the scale of population movements. The proliferation of armed groups in Syria and the fluid nature of territorial control lead to further ambiguity of the situation and challenges for movement of population into safer areas.

Some border crossing points are in remote, hard to reach and insecure areas making it more difficult for those forced to flee by foot to reach a host country.

Of the 8 official crossings into Turkey, the one controlled by the GoS (11) is closed and the 4 controlled by Syrian Kurdish Forces (8-11) are closed or frequently subject to rigid controls. There are unofficial crossing points, of which at least 3 are known and monitored by the GoS, that facilitate humanitarian access or provide a ‘fast’ route for desperate IDPs.

Syrians with passports can cross the border freely without an entry visa, as visa requirements between Turkey and Syria were mutually lifted in August 2009. Although Turkey has an open border policy for all Syrians, the GoT has in practice limited the number of Syrians entering without papers since the summer of 2012.

With some exceptions, in the eastern and western extremities, the Turkish-Syrian border is generally characterised by plans gradually turning into rolling hills farther into Turkish territory and is hence extremely porous, enabling unmonitored passage.

The northern provinces host the 3 official border crossings: Al Qa‘im (15) and Al Waleed (16), both in Anbar, and Ras Al Ain (17), both under GoS control. In addition, there are numerous other unofficial border crossings in close proximity, all of which are monitored by GoS. The central area bordering Al-Sweida governorate sees little to no refugee movement as it is under firm GoS control. The Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) man several unofficial border crossings in the eastern region as refugees from Syria are increasingly using eastern routes to enter Jordan due to restrictions in the west.

The Jordanian side of the Jordan-Syria border is heavily militarised, particularly in the western areas bordering Dar al-Ain governorate, while the eastern border, which is predominantly desert, is secured by regular patrols rather than large military positions.

The main entry points to Egypt for Syrians have been the international Cairo and Alexandria airports and a lesser degree the seaports, particularly Nuweiba.

Egypt had extended an open border policy to Syrians fleeing the conflict, allowing them to obtain a visa on arrival, until July 2013 when the political and social turmoil in Egypt lead to a revision of this policy. Syrians now require an entry visa and security clearance prior to arriving in Egypt. Those arriving without the necessary documents are returned to Syria. The authorities have said that these measures are temporary, but as of 1 September 2013 they remain in place.

Golan Heights

There are no known cases of refugee movement across the Quneitra border (19). There are reported isolated cases of medical evacuation and goods being transported through.