



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط  
The Middle East Council of Churches

On the occasion of the World Day of Migrants  
and Refugees - 29th of September

## Forced Migration or Asylum and Displacement is the feature of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Report reveals the Extent of the Disaster



Photos Credit: UNHCR

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As a result of armed struggles and conflict, the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was branded as an era of forced migration. Millions of people were forced to leave their homes and belongings, in an attempt to escape the violence and merely rekindle hope for a brighter future. This led to unforeseen socioeconomic ramifications and pressures on host communities; a point which in no ways whatsoever should be blamed on those forced to displace. Before we carry on with our study, it is important to emphasize that forced migrants are divided into several categories. Due to the discrepancy about the term “Asylum Seekers”, we will only take into consideration two main categories as recognized by the UNHCR: Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Refugees, according to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees are “persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection”.

As for IDPs, they are deemed as persons who have remained within their own country and have not crossed any borders. They remain under the protection of its government, even if that government is the reason for their displacement.<sup>1</sup>

Major obstacles still stand in the way of forced migrants, whose number amounts to 70.8<sup>2</sup>, according to the UNHCR. Some can be attributed to forced deportation, poor integration policies, racism, resource-strained host communities, and the rise of neo-conservatism. As such, we will be reviewing the most notable crises that relate to the forced migration plight and what faith based organizations are doing to quell the ramifications of the predicament.

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Website, <https://www.unhcr.org/internally-displaced-people.html>

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR Website, <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>



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## The Syrian Refugee Crisis

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Ever since the war erupted in Syria in 2011, 50% of Syrian population was displaced. Syrians were forced to emigrate from Syria to neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and North African countries. According to the UNHCR, the number of Syrians holding refugee status in these countries amounts to 5.6 million persons of concern.

In Lebanon, more than a million Syrian refugees suffer from drained financial resources as 70% live below the poverty line. Since there are no formal refugee camps, Syrian refugees are scattered among 2100 rural and urban communities and areas. As a result, they share tight spaces in lodgings with several families.

When it comes to Turkey, the country hosts over 3.6 million Syrian refugees. The majority of them live in urban areas, with over 240,000 accommodated in the 22 government-run refugee camps. Syrians in Turkey face diminished access to income-generating opportunities as only 3% of refugees have a legal work permit. As a result, this caused the poor-integration of refugees as many sought to work illegally; a move that in turn caused a rift between the local communities and the refugees. Moreover, Syrian refugees, especially in the year of 2019, suffered from forced deportation and rampant crackdown by the police.

In Jordan, Syrian refugees amount to 655,000 women and children, 80% of which live outside camps. Since their first arrival to the country, many had limited means to cover even their basic needs. As for those who had that option, now rely on savings or support from host families and are now increasingly in need of help. It is estimated that 93% of Syrians in Jordan live below the poverty line.

As for Iraq, the country hosts more than 228,000 refugees spread across several regions such as Erbil, Dahuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Anbar. Even though the percentage of refugee households claiming to have access to income-generating opportunities is 59%, only 11% of the refugee households report having access to humanitarian aid where as 21% have knowledge of legal and justice bodies in Iraq.

Meanwhile, Egypt is home to more than 126,000 Syrian refugees who are catered to by the UNHCR. Although the government has executed several policies to safeguard refugees, especially in the health sector, and several INGOs such as the World Food Program have secured impressive donor support to enhance food security, Syrian refugees still face a formidable challenge in the integration process. Just like in all western societies, Syrians face rampant racism and xenophobia from local communities, as often they are blamed for setbacks in the economy. They are also blamed for interfering in the country's politics.



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## The Iraqi Humanitarian Crisis

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Despite the return of several Iraqis to their places of origin due to the improvement of the security situation, there still exists about 1.8 million IDPs of whom 450,000 are distributed in formal camp locations, and more than 120,000 in informal settlements and collective centers throughout the country. In some areas, living conditions are not considered to be satisfactory, dignified and safe. Although there are attempts by national government and foreign partners to rebuild the infrastructure of the country, it will take the country over a year to complete reconstruction.

Though the overall situation in Iraq tends to show optimistic signs, there still lingers signs of religious persecution of certain communities. For instance, Christians, whose number has dwindled from 1.2 million to less than 250,000, still face day-to-day discrimination that is forcing them to leave the country, even though the reign of ISIS is over.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Yazidis face a similar problem. During the ISIS's war of terror on Iraq, it has injected a mindset on Iraqis, forcing them to label Yazidis as infidels; a notion that still exists today. Like Christians, they were forced to leave Iraq to settle in foreign countries where as thousands still live in camps, fearing a return to their lands.

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## The Palestinian Refugee Crisis

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The 1948 conflict, which resulted in the abandonment of Palestinian-recognized territories, saw the displacement of 750,000 people. Nowadays, the UNRWA has to tend to 1.5 million Palestinians located in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. According to the agency, an addition of 4 million Palestinians is now eligible to seek its aid.

According to the latest count of the Lebanese government, Lebanon hosts 450,000 Palestinians distributed among 12 recognized refugee camps, which suffer from serious problems, including poverty, overcrowding, unemployment, poor housing conditions and lack of infrastructure. To make matter worse, the Syrian Civil War forced Palestinian refugees to migrate to Lebanon, causing the over-crowdedness of camps.

Regarding Jordan, there are 2 million registered Palestine refugees. However, only an approximate number of 370,000 live in 10 recognized refugee camps. Due to the Syrian Civil War, tens of thousands of Palestinians poured into the country; the majority of them suffering from severe poverty and living in an unknown legal status.

Concerning the Gaza Strip, it has a population of 1.4 million Palestinian refugees, who suffer from the socio-economic implication that result blockade imposed by Israel. Due to the years of conflict and the destroyed economy, 80% of Palestinian refugees rely on humanitarian aid.

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<sup>3</sup> UN Dispatch, June 10, 2019, <https://www.undispatch.com/the-persecution-of-christians-in-iraq/>



As for the West Bank, it is home to 775,000 registered refugees, of whom around 25% live in 19 camps, which are overcrowded and lack space. Overcrowding is also a huge problem in UNRWA's schools.

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## The Afghani Refugee Crisis

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Currently, there are almost 2.5 million registered refugees from Afghanistan. They comprise the largest and most extended refugee population in all of Asia and are the second largest cross-border migrants in the world. Nowadays, refugees are spread in neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Iran.

In Pakistan, 1.4 million Afghans, distributed among 210,000 households, are registered within the UNHCR. At first, the Pakistani government was seemingly in favor of receiving refugees from Afghanistan, however, in 2001 it was no longer allowing new refugees to register, thereby preventing the provision of tents, food and other forms of support. Recently, Islamabad has started forcibly returning refugees to Afghanistan. The risk of abuse is having been significantly aggravated by the fact that refugees lack the appropriate documentation.

In Iran, while many previous Afghan refugees have been absorbed into the country's society, there is still approximately 1 million who maintain the refugee status. While the country has made significant achievements in integrating refugees and has succeeded in providing over 500,000 work visas, Iranian authorities have put together a strict new law forbidding employers to use foreign labor. This move has deprived thousands of Afghans of work opportunities, and has unleashed violence against them. As such, the economic constraints impacting the country are pushing Iran to forcibly deport several Afghani refugees, and similarly like Pakistan, to close down the borders. The UNHCR, on several occasions, has attempted to prevent Iran from doing so, but with the decline of the country's economy, led to no success whatsoever.



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## The South Sudan Refugee Crisis

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Due to the 2013 conflict that resulted to between 50,000 and 383,000 deaths which resulted in the increase of violence and deteriorating living conditions, led to the fleeing of 2.5 million refugees. It is the largest existing refugee crisis, in Africa and the third largest refugee crisis in the world. The majority of South Sudanese have fled to countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Sudan hosts approximately 850,000 South Sudanese refugees. The majority of them suffer from acute malnutrition above emergency levels amongst both refugees and the host community.

Ethiopia is home to 420,000 South Sudanese refugees, making this the largest refugee population in the country. Due to competition over scarce resources, land-related disputes, and demographic changes Intra-communal tensions have been rife.

As for Uganda, it currently hosts an estimated 780,000 South Sudanese refugees. While full food rations were restored for those who arrived after June 2015, others no longer receive food as the individual plots of land granted by the Government of Uganda, cannot produce enough yield for refugees to become wholly self-sufficient.

In Kenya, the approximate number of refugees is 114,000. When comparing the condition of South of Sudan refugees in the country to others in the rest of Africa, one could note that their situation is better. This is due to the endeavors by the government to play an increased role in the delivery of protection services. This made significant achievements in handling reception facilities, conducting registration, and refugee status determination with the aim of strengthening the national refugee management system.

As for the Democratic Republic of Congo, it hosts around 95,000 refugees who reside in deplorable and overcrowded refugee camps. Thousands reside in impoverished host communities along the border where there are immense security challenges. They also face a lack of services, and food insecurity. To make matters worse, it is estimated that 105,000 South Sudanese refugee will arrive into the DRC during 2019, due to the violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement in Central Equatorial State and Western Equatorial State.



## Faith Based Organizations' Actions in the Service of Human being Middle East Council of Churches and Diakonia

Committed to uphold human dignity not in words but in deeds, the Middle East Council of Churches through its DiaKonia department helps survivors of manmade disasters and military conflicts through the provision of all kinds of humanitarian and protection support that preserve the dignity and wellbeing of affected people. The council has adopted a new strategy to combine the humanitarian interventions with special programs that enable beneficiaries to retain their resiliency and coping better with their situation. From the outbreak of Palestinian cause through the several conflicts and wars that Middle East has been passing through, the council outreached millions of affected people through the provision of food and nonfood items, shelters, financial and health assistance, protection programs, rehabilitation of disrupted civil services as well as construction projects, livelihood programs, water and sanitation, education and finally capacity building programs. The council performs its humanitarian mission in partnership with local churches and in coordination with other actors on the ground. The added values of the council' programs are to enhance the concept of reconciliation and peace through the variety of its programs and by providing a safe space to develop positive relationships among all affected people whose backgrounds are different and pave the road towards a better shared future. The message of love and respect to served people are the corner stone of the council mission for which the council adopted the moto: "Service **in Dignity** ". The MECC in parallel with its humanitarian programs continues to advocate about issues related to refugees' rights and their protection according to international humanitarian law and Christian principles and values.

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