



## MENA'S FORCED DISPLACEMENT CRISIS

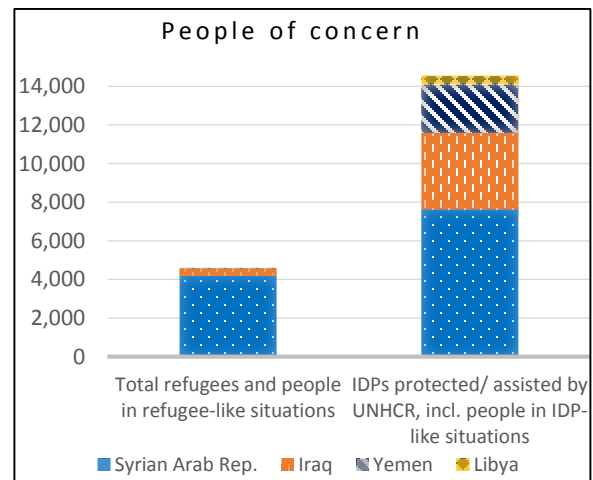
Lili Mottaghi<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction:** The latest [MENA Quarterly Economic Brief](#) estimates growth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region to fall short of expectation at 2.6 percent in 2015, about 0.2 percentage points below the October 2015 forecast. The World Bank expects the economic outlook to remain “cautiously pessimistic” in the short term. The recent poor performance of several MENA economies, and their dim prospects for the future, are partly driven by the civil wars that have created death, destruction and significant growth shortfalls in both conflict countries; Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya and their neighbors. This Quick Note summarizes the findings of the report including the important channel of forced displacement, which has become a crisis.

**Forced Displacement crisis.** Not only have the civil wars caused untold damage to human and physical capital, but they have created the biggest forced displacement crisis since World War II. More than 12 million Syrians – half the population in 2010 – have been displaced internally and externally and often multiple times, making Syria the largest displacement crisis globally (Figure 1). Two-thirds of them are displaced within the country - Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). They face multiple challenges such as life-threatening security incidents, deteriorating livelihoods, and lack of access to basic needs. The rest, over 4.6 million, have fled to neighboring countries and Europe. More than 85 percent of the Syrian refugees are hosted in the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. While Turkey hosts the

largest number of Syrian refugees, the share of the refugee population to the national population is much higher in Jordan and Lebanon where they respectively account for 20% and 23% of the population (Table 1). According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 813,599 Syrians have sought asylum in Europe, mostly in Germany, Sweden, Hungary and Austria.

**Figure 1. Estimate of refugees and IDPs (Thousands)**



Source: UNHCR, International Organization for Migration (IOM), governments, and NGOs.

Iraq has about 4 million IDPs and the number of Iraqis seeking refuge in other countries is rising. The escalation of conflict across the central governorates of Iraq and the deteriorating security situation have resulted in new and secondary movements of IDPs across central

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Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Table 2). UNHCR estimates the number of Iraqis of concern to likely exceed 3 million people.

**Table 1. Number of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries (as of January 19, 2016)**

Host country	Total estimated Syrians	Registered refugees	Percent of total registered refugees
Lebanon	1,500,000	1,069,111	23.2
Jordan	1,400,000	635,324	13.8
Turkey	2,750,000	2,503,549	54.4
Iraq	250,000	245,022	5.3
Egypt	260,000	123,585	2.7
North Africa	50,000	26,772	0.6
<b>Total persons</b>	<b>6,210,000</b>	<b>4,603,363</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: UNHCR. Note: Total estimated Syrian represents Government estimates, including registered Syrian refugees, unregistered Syrian refugees as well as Syrians residing in the host countries under alternative legal frameworks.

Countries bordering conflict zones, many of them already in fragile situations, are facing tremendous budgetary pressure. According to government estimates, each refugee costs the Jordanian government USD 3,750 (2,500 dinars) to host per year.<sup>2</sup> The influx of more than 630,000 Syrian refugees is thus estimated to have cost Jordan over USD 2.5 billion a year. This amounts to 6 percent of GDP and one-fourth of government's annual revenues. Under this situation, government debt is accumulating fast - estimated at 90 percent of GDP in 2015.

In Yemen, the number of IDPs has increased five-fold since the outbreak of conflict in March 2015, reaching over 2.5 million people, or 10 percent of the population, in December 2015 (Figure 2). Most IDPs originated from Aden, Al Dhale'e and Sa'ada. More than 30 percent of displaced households in some areas are female-headed, an increase from 9 percent before the crisis. There has also been a rise in the number of refugees since the crisis. More than three

<sup>2</sup> Jordan Ministry of Interior.

quarters of Yemeni refugees have fled to Saudi Arabia,

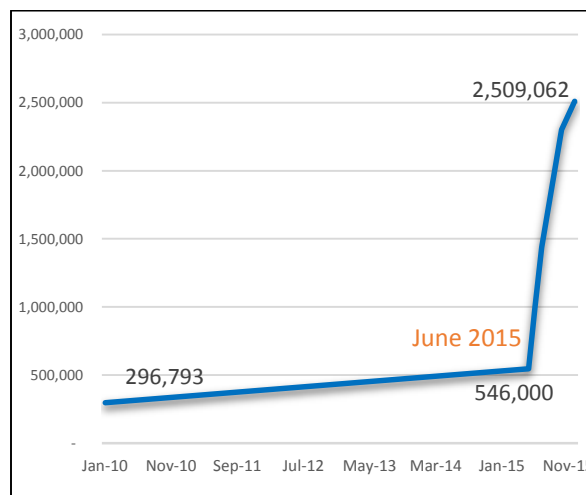
**Table 2. Iraqi refugee crisis**

	Origin	January 2015	December 2015
		Total in country	Total in country
<b>Refugees</b>	Palestinian	12,000	12,400
	Syrian Arab Rep.	310,000	400,000
	Turkey	16,000	16,600
	Various	8,300	8,550
<b>People in refugee-like situations</b>	Various	2,000	1,500
<b>Asylum-seekers</b>	Islamic Rep. of Iran	6,000	5,500
	Syrian Arab Rep.	1,200	1,200
	Turkey	1,400	1,500
	Various	800	800
<b>Returnee arrivals during year (ex-refugees)</b>	Iraq	40,000	35,000
<b>Internally displaced</b>	Iraq	1,500,000	1,400,000
<b>Returnee arrivals during year (ex-IDPs)</b>	Iraq	100,000	90,000
<b>Stateless</b>	Stateless	50,000	46,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,047,700</b>	<b>2,019,050</b>

Source: UNHCR

Oman and Djibouti. At the same time, the country hosts refugees mainly from Somalia and Ethiopia. Internal conflicts including tribal clashes continue to create new displacement. The crisis in Libya has led to many Libyans fleeing to Tunisia, although the exact number is uncertain given that Libyans have been crossing the border for commerce and other purposes for some time. This has negatively affected the Tunisian economy. According to local authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), there are also 435,000 IDPs in Libya.

**Figure 2. Yemen IDPs crisis**



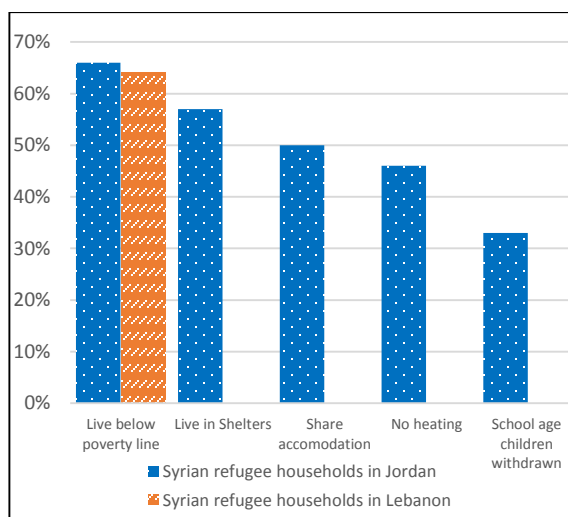
Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)

**Living Condition of Refugees and IDPs:** Data from UNHCR show that half of Syrian refugees are of working age between 18-64 years (with half of them being female), and were economically active in Syria prior to the crisis. More than half of all Syrian refugees are under the age of 18. Most of them have been out of school for years. They face an uncertain future. Unemployment rates are high, particularly among women, at 68 percent. As for the rest, with difficulties in obtaining work permits in host countries, many work in the informal sector with no protection. A recent survey by the International Labor Organization (ILO) shows that about 92 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon have no work contract and more than half of them work on a seasonal, weekly or daily basis at low wages that often do not cover their basic needs.

Syrian refugees are extremely vulnerable. [A recent survey](#) by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP based on an assessment of more than 4,000 refugee households in Lebanon shows that almost half of the refugees were in debt and 39 percent of those surveyed cannot afford medical care. Free primary health care is available to only 12 percent of the households surveyed. Estimates by UNHCR show that 7 in 10 registered Syrian refugees living in Jordan and

Lebanon are considered poor. This number increases to 9 in 10 refugees if the poverty lines used by the respective host countries are considered. The poverty rate of Syrian refugees is higher in Jordan than in Lebanon. In Jordan, there is also evidence that poverty among refugees has increased by several percentage points between 2013 and 2015 (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Syrian refugees' living conditions in Lebanon and Jordan**



Source: UNHCR.

Yemen faces a growing poverty crisis. Before the war, more than half the population lived in extreme poverty (below USD 1.90 a day) and more than half of the youth were unemployed. These numbers have been increasing since the war and more than 20 million people -- 82 percent of Yemenis--are now considered poor. These include more than 15 million without access to health facilities and medical care. With people fleeing their homes and no formal camps, displaced people are sheltered in 260 schools, preventing access to education for 13,000 children. According to Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), an additional 1.8 million children have lost the possibility of receiving an education, with more than 3,500 schools closed across the country. This is in addition to an estimated 1.6 million children with no access to schools before March.

Since the escalation of violence, more than 537,000 children (one-eighth of all children under the age of five) are estimated to be at risk of severe malnutrition. These challenges are exacerbated by rising prices that have already reduced access to food and safe water, basic public services and livelihood opportunities.

Overall, millions of Syrians, Iraqis, Yemenis and Libyans have been forced to flee their homes or displaced within the country. They are in need of urgent humanitarian and financial assistance. According to the United Nations (U.N.) for Syria only, it will take US\$ 7.7 billion to meet the urgent needs of the most vulnerable people in 2016.

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