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THE REFUGEE 'CRISIS' IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

FACTSHEET



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INTRODUCTION

Refugees are not a new phenomenon in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Jordan has been accepting refugees for nearly 70 years, hosting those who have fled to the country from the Palestinian territories, Iraq, Syria and beyond.

Recent conflicts across the Middle East, including in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, have triggered an additional mass displacement of people, with millions fleeing violence and instability. While the European Union struggles to integrate more than 2.4 million refugees and asylum-seekers who have crossed into its member states' territories since 2015, states across the MENA region have taken on most of the burden. Jordan, a country of just 9.8 million people, hosts about 2.8 million refugees and asylum-seekers, while nearly 1.5 million are living in Lebanon.

There is an urgent need to put the so-called 'refugee crisis' into a broader global context. The international community has to come up with long-term solutions rather than quick-fix responses. The response to the refugee situation in the MENA region may give European states and institutions some food for thought.

This factsheet focuses on the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, seeking to answer the essential questions of how the influx of people has affected these states, as well as how they have risen to the challenge.

The information contained in this publication is by no means exhaustive: we have relied on data from a range of sources, including the European Commission, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Eurostat, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), broadcaster Al Jazeera, and the Jordan Response Platform. While there may not always be agreement among institutions when it comes to the numbers, the big story remains unchanged: the refugee situation in the MENA region has reached extreme heights.





WHAT IS CAUSING THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS IN THE MENA REGION?

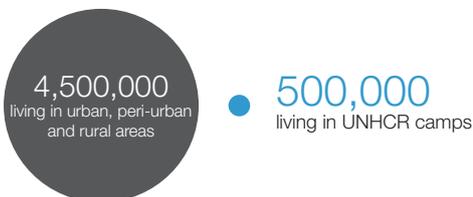
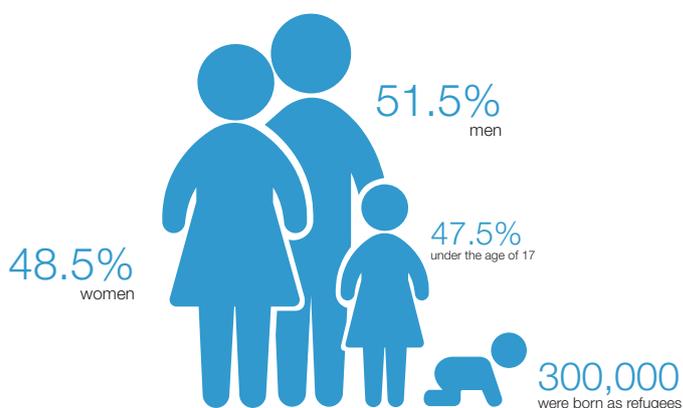
- The Syrian conflict began in 2011 when Syrians, energised by the Arab Spring revolts across North Africa and resenting the lack of freedom and poor economic conditions, began to protest against President Bashar Al-Assad's government. Assad responded by killing and imprisoning demonstrators.
- In response, military defectors banded together to form the Free Syrian Army. Civil conflict spread across the country. Opposition fighters are overwhelmingly made up of Sunni Muslims—the majority sect in the country—while Assad and the country's security sector are overwhelmingly Alawites.
- More than 450,000 Syrians have been killed and more than a million injured since the start of the conflict.
- The Syrian conflict has displaced more than 6.1 million people within the country, while nearly 4.8 million have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.
- UNICEF estimates that 652 children were killed in Syria in 2016, while 850 were recruited as child fighters.
- From 2007 to 2010, a drought had already led nearly 1.5 million Syrians to migrate from rural to urban areas, steadily increasing societal tensions and straining public services.
- The number of refugees in the MENA region is far greater than the number of refugees reaching Europe's shores. The UNHCR projects that in 2017 there will be nearly 19 million people of concern living in the MENA region, including more than 2.5 million refugees and 14 million internally-displaced persons (IDPs). Ninety-five per cent of these people will be in the Middle East.
- As of April 2017, more than five million Syrian refugees were registered in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and across North Africa.
- Based on data from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, 48.5% of registered Syrian refugees are women, while 47.5% are under the age of 17.
- At least half of all Syrian refugees are children; more than 300,000 were born as refugees.
- As of March 2017 fewer than 500,000 people in the region were living in UNHCR camps, while the remaining 90% of refugees lived in urban, peri-urban and rural areas.
- More than 90% of Syrians in Jordan live below the poverty line, and nearly 80% of those registered with the UNHCR in refugee camps are women and children.
- As of March 2017 an estimated 60,000 Syrians were living in a three-year-old camp in no-man's land between Syria and Jordan. Following an attack on Jordanian border guards in June 2016 – for which the self-styled 'Islamic State', or Daesh, claimed responsibility – the border was sealed, leaving the camp inaccessible to aid workers.
- There are more than 4,000 informal settlements housing refugees across Lebanon. Each settlement can range from just a dozen to more than a hundred tents or huts.

HOW IS THE REFUGEE CRISIS MANIFESTING ITSELF IN THE MENA REGION?

19 MILLION people of concern living in the MENA region

2.5 million refugees

14 million internally-displaced persons (IDPs)



HOW ARE SOME MENA COUNTRIES RESPONDING TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS?

- As of March 2017 approximately 656,000 Syrians and 62,000 Iraqis had registered with UNHCR in Jordan.
- From 2016 to 2017 the Jordanian government issued 39,000 work permits to Syrians.
- Approximately 70,000 Syrian children have received birth registration in Jordan since the beginning of the crisis.
- Jointly with national and international partners, the Lebanese government formed the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). The plan takes the form of a strategic framework for 2017 to 2020 and aims to respond to the needs of both the country and vulnerable populations within it during the Syria crisis. Its strategic objectives include:
 - ensuring the protection of Syrian and Palestinian refugees and displaced people, as well as vulnerable Lebanese people;
 - providing assistance to vulnerable populations;
 - strengthening the capacity of national and local services to improve quality of and access to basic public services; and
 - reinforcing social, economic and environmental stability in Lebanon.



WHAT IS THE JORDAN RESPONSE PLAN 2017-2019?

- The Jordan Response Plan (JRP) 2017-2019 is a three-year plan conceived as part of the Jordan 2025 blueprint. The JRP links short-term coping solutions to long-term initiatives to ensure better integration for critical humanitarian response measures and medium-term interventions. These efforts aim to strengthen both local and national resilience.
- Jordan collaborates with the international community, implementing its plan through funding from the EU and a series of United Nations bodies such as the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization, as well as those UN agencies working in the areas of development (UNDP), education and culture (UNESCO), population activities (UNFPA), children's rights (UNICEF), humanitarian affairs (OCHA), and women's rights (UN Women).
- The JRP addresses the needs of all those affected by the Syrian crisis, from the refugees themselves to local Jordanian communities and institutions. Through the JRP, individual plans have been created for each of 12 sectors, ranging from education to energy and from transport to social protection.
- By adopting a three-year approach the JRP hopes to mitigate the risks associated with securing reliable funding, enabling Jordan to deliver both short-term humanitarian and long-term resilience-based responses.
- The total budget for the three-year plan is US\$7.642bn.
- The Jordanian government has been working to mitigate the impact of the Syrian crisis by improving resilience capabilities since 2013, when it developed its first National Resilience Plan. This first plan, for 2014, focused on host communities.



HOW MUCH INTERNATIONAL AID HAS BEEN ALLOCATED?

- Since the start of the Syria crisis the European Commission has allocated more than €657m in humanitarian, development and macro-financial assistance to refugees and vulnerable communities in Jordan alone. More than €271m comes from the humanitarian budget.
- Aid to Syria makes up half of the Commission's total humanitarian aid budget.
- The EU-Jordan Compact Agreement, signed in December 2016, foresees at least €747m in aid for 2016-2017.
- According to the World Bank, the top refugee-hosting nations (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey) received more than \$9bn in international development aid in 2015. The OECD reports that the same countries received nearly \$2.5 trillion in international humanitarian aid that same year.
- UNHCR has budgeted more than \$20bn to aid people of concern in the MENA region in 2017.

HOW HAS CIVIL SOCIETY RISEN TO THE CHALLENGE?

Across the region, civil society groups have formed to confront the hardships brought about by the refugee crisis. Unrestricted by bureaucratic red tape, these groups are able to act quickly in a crisis and to operate in ways that governments cannot.

While there are many organisations active in the region, here are just a few examples.

- In Lebanon, civil society groups across a range of sectors have worked to bridge the gaps between needs and what the government is capable of supplying.
- Himaya, a Lebanese NGO, is dedicated to the protection of children in the country. It offers training sessions to children and caregivers and provides psychosocial support to Syrian refugee children who are living in crisis environments and who have been victims of violence.
- The Lebanon-based Amel Association, formed in 1979 to respond to the Lebanese civil war, activated an emergency plan in 2012 in response to the Syrian crisis, providing affected populations with primary healthcare, education, training and other services.
- The Jordanian NGO Takaful, located in Ramtha on the Syrian border, provides cash assistance, food relief and health services to refugees. In 2013 the organisation provided cash assistance to 5,000 Syrian families, food assistance to 10,000 families, and health services to 20,000 families.

CONCLUSION

Countries across the MENA region have struggled with the challenges of hosting hundreds of thousands of new inhabitants but have at the same time developed innovative response strategies. As the international community continues to work to respond to the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, states and governments should look to the MENA region for cooperation and an exchange of best practice.

The refugee crisis has and will continue to resonate globally. With a protracted crisis in Syria and migration flows projected to remain high, there is an urgent need for states and institutions to think about long-term solutions. Members of the international community must talk to each other if it is to learn and to forge realistic and comprehensive policies that address both challenges and opportunities.



FURTHER READING

'Along Syria-Jordan border, refugees struggle at a camp aid workers can't visit'
NPR, 20 March 2017

'Global Focus: Jordan'
UN Refugee Agency, 2016

'Global focus: Middle East and North Africa'
UN Refugee Agency, 2017

'Global migration's impact and opportunity'
McKinsey Global Institute, November 2016

'Humanitarian aid'
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

'Inter-agency mapping project (IAMP): map of informal settlements in Lebanon'
UN Refugee Agency, 6 February 2017

'Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020'
Government of Lebanon and UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon,
January 2017

'Main indicators'
Jordanian Department of Statistics

'Net official development assistance received'
World Bank

'Prevention program'
Himaya

'Programs'
Amel Association

'Syria regional refugee response: regional overview'
UN Refugee Agency, 1 May 2017

'Syria's civil war explained from the beginning'
Al Jazeera, 4 May 2017

'The Jordan Response Plan for the Syria crisis 2017-2019: executive summary'
Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

'UNHCR operational update: Jordan'
UN Refugee Agency, March 2017



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