



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Workshop: Forced Migration in Arab Countries

Doha, 30 November – 1 December 2019

Background Paper



Over the last two decades, forced international migration has reached unprecedented levels of intensity both quantitatively and qualitatively. It is a thorny and extremely sensitive issue that different countries have dealt with in wildly differing ways. Since at least the end of the Second World War it has been a common fixture on UN agendas, in international relations, in government policy, in the programs of domestic political forces in the West, in host countries more generally, and likewise in countries of origin.

Forced international migration is the other face of forced domestic migration (internal displacement) resulting from war and insecurity, sometimes mixed with deliberate policies of ethnic cleansing.

According to UNHCR figures there were some 68.5 million displaced persons worldwide in 2018. 25.4 million of these held official refugee status (19.9 million registered with the UNHCR and 5.4 million Palestinians registered with UNRWA), 40 million were IDPs, and 3.1 million were asylum seekers.⁽¹⁾ One study based on an IMO report estimates that of some 60 million displaced persons worldwide 40 million are from the Arab region, particularly Syria, Iraq and Somalia.⁽²⁾ While the scale of displacement differs between Arab countries, the figures expose a phenomenon both tragic and dangerous.

A few figures suffice to give a clearer idea of this understudied aspect of the refugee crisis. In Yemen, for example, UN-OCHA estimates that there are as many as three million internal refugees. In Iraq there are two million Iraqi IDPs, excluding of course those who have been forced to migrate away from their home country. In Somalia, about 750,000 people fled the horrors of war between 1992 and 1995, and during the conflict period of 1995 - 1997 approximately 1.5 million people were internally displaced. There was no mass population displacement during the War on Terror, because most military operations and terror attacks were strategic, sporadic and targeted specific geographical areas, and thus had no direct effect on the population. But the explosion of conflict that began on 20 December 2006 and is still going on as of this date has led to the displacement of more than two million people. Most of these people have fled internally to safer areas or else to neighbouring countries: Yemen, Djibouti, and Uganda.⁽³⁾

International forced migration from Arab countries as a result of extended civil conflict accounts for a large percentage of the global refugee population. According to UNHCR statistics,⁽⁴⁾ between 2005 and 2018 more than 49% of the 25.4 million officially designated refugees were from five Arab countries affected by domestic conflicts.⁽⁵⁾ The number of refugees from Syria rose from 328,000 in

1 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017 (Geneva: UNHCR, 25 June 2018), p. 2.

2 UN & IOM (2016), "International Migration Report 2016: Migration, Displacement and Development in a Changing Arab Region," accessed on 13/4/2019, at: <https://bit.ly/2lwHq0y>; UN & IOM (2018), "International Migration Report 2018" accessed on 13/4/2019, at: <https://bit.ly/2jD8UmP>

3 Musa Alaya, "Ihsa'iyyat wa-Itijahat as-Sira'at fi'l-'Alam al-'Arabi", in a forthcoming book to be published by the ACRPS.

4 The UNHCR defines refugees as "someone who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his or her former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it. In this series, refugees refer to persons granted a humanitarian status and/or those granted temporary protection. Included are persons who have been granted temporary protection on a group basis. The series also includes returned refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons and persons displaced internally within their own country and others of concern to UNHCR." UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Statistics Division), *World Statistics Pocketbook, 2018 Edition*, p. 284.

5 UNHCR, "Figures at a Glance" June 19, 2018, accessed on 6/4/2019, at: <https://bit.ly/2CjoOgR>



2005 to more than 6,544,000 in 2018; from Yemen 82,000 in 2005 to more than 508,000 in 2010 and 867,000 in 2018; from Iraq 133,000 in 2005 to 117,000 in 2010 and 366,000 in 2018; and from Libya 12,000 in 2005 to more than 341,000 in 2018.⁽⁶⁾

This confirms that between 2005 and 2018 forced international migration has become an Arab phenomenon, a phenomenon embedded in the structure of Arab societies that will have repercussions for years or perhaps decades to come. These developments follow the enduring failure of Arab states to fulfil their promises, for various reasons: their political regimes' authoritarian management of social and cultural diversity, the failure of development policy to absorb wave after wave of young people, the failure of social participation, the establishment of a relationship with society based on violence and not on law, and the destruction of the concept of citizenship itself.

The phenomenon is a complex one involving many different factors. One of these factors is the declining number of refugees returning to their own countries after the end of conflict, especially when those conflicts last a long time: by the time the war ends, many of them have built new lives in new places and can no longer go home. There are historical precedents for this. After the Mount Lebanon conflicts of the 19th century few Christians returned to Deir al-Qamar. Nor did many Bosnians go back to areas from which they had been expelled during the Yugoslav Wars. Both of these groups had been given the right to return but chose not to. Another factor is security: many countries treat refugees as a threat to national security, and some extremist groups sometimes use refugees' precarious situation as a recruitment tool, while others use them as a political football. Yet another is the phenomenon of the double refugee, now commonplace in Arab countries: generations of Palestinians, for example, have been displaced for the second or third time from Yarmouk Camp in Syria.

This new phenomenon affecting millions of people in the Arab World raises many questions about the fate of refugees and possible solutions to the problem. International refugee law provides for three general solutions to refugee problems: voluntary return, integration in the host society, or resettlement in a third country. These three alternatives were put in place to serve as a "permanent solution" to the refugee crisis, aiming to ensure that refugees received citizenship in order to protect their basic rights. Third-country resettlement is considered the least attractive of these options, and the UNHCR encourages refugees to return to their home country once a conflict ends. American and European policies have gradually distanced themselves from the first option, preferring to view refugees as a resource rather than a burden and favouring citizenship rights and integration.

This policy direction has come under increasing pressure since 2005 with the rise and electoral success of the populist right. The idea of building walls, rather than building bridges, has brought together many of those opposed to international migration in general and forced migration in particular. Some right-wing Western governments have pursued pre-emptive measures against further migration from current refugee areas of origin – Syria's neighbours, for example – to try

⁶ UN, *Global Statistics Pocketbook*, pp. 152, 234, 262, 284.



and transform refugees from passive recipients of humanitarian aid to economic agents capable of earning enough money to discourage them from migrating to Europe. This policy is “preventative” and has coincided with efforts in some of those Arab countries themselves to repatriate Syrian refugees regardless of whether it is safe for them to return.

European and American policies generally are moving towards aggressive delimitation of migration and dealing with forcible migration either by granting temporary and conditional residency subject to numerous limitations or by the French model of assimilation (which risks marginalization and exclusion). While the populist right have built legal and physical walls (USA), put refugees in detention camps (Greece, Eastern and Southern Europe), some countries (Germany, Sweden, some Scandinavian countries) have pursued a more flexible policy based on integration into the existing political and cultural system while still allowing a space for migrants to give expression to their culture and language.

The flexible model that provides opportunities for integration in the host country is becoming more and more limited, particularly in Germany, where temporary residence is increasingly common. In Germany the fate of temporary residence holders is likely to be similar to that of Bosnian refugees who were deported as soon as Bosnia was “safe”. Sweden and other host countries have likewise begun to impose tight restrictions on temporary residencies. Some of the countries bordering on Syria are trying to dispose of their refugee populations by any means necessary, even if repatriating them puts their lives in danger. Images of the hostile, almost racist treatment dealt out to refugees in some of those countries are now a familiar sight. All this while a solution to the conflict that produced this vast movement of refugees seems as far away as ever.

When discussing solutions to refugee crises it is useful to distinguish between the right of return as a human right and repatriation. In this context we are talking about voluntary return or safe return. All of these terms lack unambiguous definitions (there are three traditional solutions: local integration, resettlement and voluntary repatriation). A refugee can exercise their right of return regardless of whether it is safe to do so. But repatriation requires certain conditions to be met, including safety in the home country. If these conditions are not met repatriation is a violation of international law and against the human rights of the refugees.

While there are many organizations and official bodies that have busied themselves studying forced migration and proposing solutions, the phenomenon has not received enough attention from Arab academics and researchers.

As part of efforts to fill this lacuna, the ACRPS – as an academic organization concerned with issues affecting Arab societies and with ongoing Arab socio-political issues – invites researchers and academics interested in the escalating problem of displacement both internal and external in the Arab World to participate in a workshop titled **Forced Migration in Arab Countries**. Papers should fall under one of the following themes:



1. Critical surveys of forced migration literature establishing its strengths and weaknesses.
2. The scope of the problem in the Arab World and particularly the five countries (Syria, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Iraq) that account for the majority of forced migration worldwide: introductions to refugee and IDP statistics and their places of residence and living conditions in host countries
3. The legal dimension of forced migration, focusing on its application in host societies.
4. Refugees in host societies: the burdens of humanitarian aid, with explanation of the difference between refugees and IDPs, between urban and rural areas and refugee camps.
5. The role of Arab government organizations (the Arab League) and NGOs searching for an active role in the humanitarian sphere.
6. Horizons and challenges of return.

The requirements for submissions are as follows:

1. The Academic Committee will accept abstracts on the themes given above submitted before the end of May 2019. Abstracts should clearly show the research problematic, a command of related literature and the approach and new value of the research. They should be submitted, accompanied by an up-to-date CV and a completed copy of the research proposal form attached [here](#), to migration@dohainstitute.org.
2. Proposals approved by the Academic Committee must be completed and submitted by mid-September 2019, after which they will be subject to peer review. The Committee's approval of a proposal does not mean automatic approval of the final paper. This is contingent on peer review. The Committee will only accept complete studies that meet the ACRPS's specifications for research papers, available [here](#).
3. The Academic Committee will only accept papers that reviewers believe to be distinguished by critical academic value or a new or different approach to their topic, and which have not been published in whole or in part elsewhere or submitted to any other conference.
4. The workshop will be held on 30 November – 1 December 2019, in Doha.
5. The Committee will not provide any financial compensation for papers, but will meet the cost of travel and accommodation.