III. How are refugee flows changing the Middle East?

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The wars in Iraq and Syria had displaced around 4 million Iraqis and 12 million Syrians as of June 2015, marking a historic turning point for the region.[1] The increasingly sectarian nature of these conflicts in both countries is undermining the principle of a nation state built on societal diversity. Both government forces and non-state actors are targeting individuals and communities on the basis of ethnic or religious identity. Meanwhile, concern over different aspects of identity is affecting the refugee policies of Lebanon and Jordan, two countries that, with Turkey, currently host the majority of Iraqi and Syrian refugees (see figure 2.4). Lebanese politicians are concerned that the influx of large numbers of refugees might derail the delicate sectarian balance in the country and undermine its current governance structure. In Jordan, concerns about identity focus on questions of national origin, and that East Jordanians are becoming a minority in their own country.[2] In four Arab countries, two of which are haemorrhaging citizens and two receiving incoming populations, a substantive new underclass of citizens has emerged. In Syria and Iraq, millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) are living in precarious conditions, on the run in their own land. In Lebanon and Jordan, refugees have settled in the poorest regions of both countries, triggering a growth in the size of vulnerable populations.[3] If left unaddressed, the fallout of identity-based polarization and the expansion in vulnerable populations will have profound repercussions for regional and international stability.[4]

Dismembering states and fragmenting societies

Syria today is broadly governed—to the degree that it is governed at all—by five distinct entities: the Syrian Government; Islamic State (IS), see section II; the Jabhat al-Nusra, an opposition group with ties to al-Qaeda, and its allies; the Free Syrian Army and other rebel groups; and the Kurds, see section IV. The Syrian state has lost control of over 80 per cent of its territory to these different non-state actors as well as thousands of smaller paramilitary groups.[5] Rough population estimates suggest that government held areas have around 10 million inhabitants or 63 per cent of those still in Syria, while

[1] On the conflict in Syria see chapter 4, section II, in this volume.
[2] Yahya, M., *Refugees and the Making of an Arab Regional Disorder* (Carnegie Middle East Center: Beirut, 9 Nov. 2015).
[3] Yahya (note 2).
[4] On the impact of the refugee crisis in Europe see chapter 11, section III, in this volume.
[5] Strack, C., 'Syrian Government no longer controls 83% of the country', Jane's 360, 23 Aug. 2015.

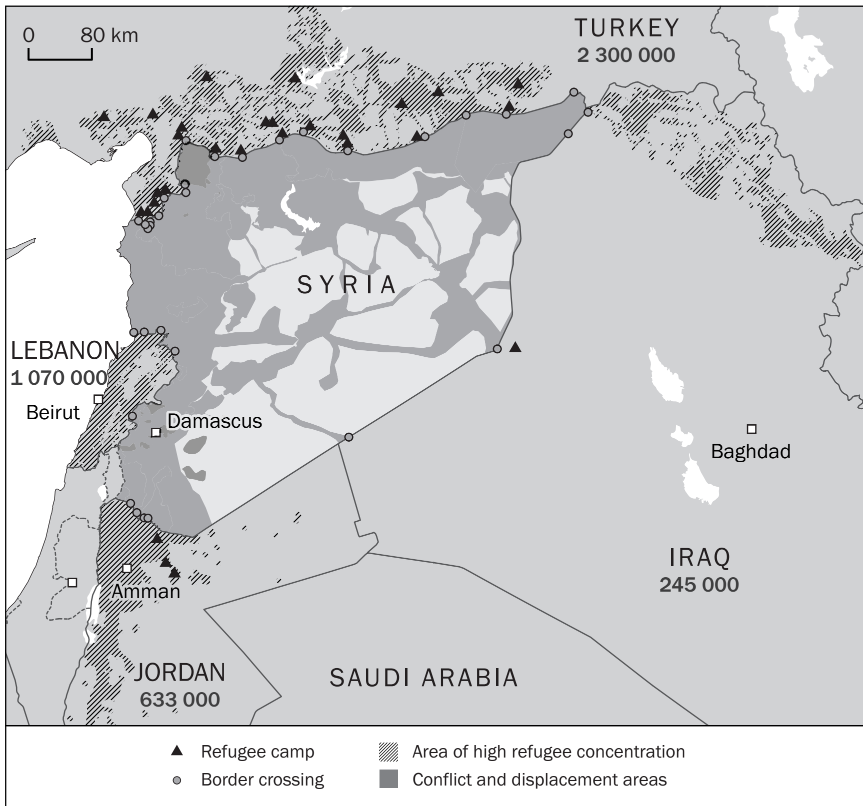

Figure 2.4. Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries

Credit: Hugo Ahlenius, Nordpil, <https://nordpil.se/>.
Sources: Syria Live Map, <http://syria.liveuamap.com/en/time/03.01.2016>, Accessed 27 Apr. 2016; and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Syrian Arab Republic: humanitarian snapshot (as of 31 Dec. 2015)', <http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-humanitarian-snapshot-31-december-2015-enar>, Accessed 2 May 2016; and US State Department, Humanitarian Information Unit, 'Syria: numbers and locations of refugees and IDPs', 17 Apr. 2015.

IS and Kurdish held areas contain 2 million inhabitants each. A further 2 million citizens are dispersed in the remaining parts of the country.[6]

The most visible consequences of this fragmentation and the associated conflicts are the brutal population movements that are taking place at a scale and pace unprecedented in the Arab region's recent history.[7] Warring par-

[6] Balanche, F., 'Ethnic cleansing threatens Syria's Unity', Washington Institute, 3 Dec. 2015.

[7] For various reasons, figures for refugees and displaced populations are estimates. This includes the inability of the UN and other international agencies to reach some conflict zones, the difficulties of assessing repeat population movements, the concern that numbers may be over- or understated depending on political interests, and that national systems of data collection on entry and exit into neighbouring countries are not always reliable. However, reasonable estimates are possible using

ties are also targeting individuals and communities on the basis of sectarian and ethnic identity. Meanwhile, borders and state control of territory are crumbling in the face of subnational entities.

Both Iraq and Syria have become wastelands of death and destruction that account for 90 per cent of the displacements in Middle East and North African countries.[8] The displacement of Iraqis has been more protracted, beginning with the first Gulf War in 1990, increasing and decreasing with successive external wars and internal conflicts, and intensifying after the emergence of the self-proclaimed IS. In the 12 months that followed the establishment of IS in June 2014, 2.57 million people fled as the group targeted entire communities that had lived on the plains of Iraq for centuries.[9] The brutal response in 2011 by the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to a peaceful civil uprising demanding political and socio-economic reform opened the door to a civil war with multiple conflict parties and a dramatic collapse of state and society that have not just mimicked, but surpassed the colossal losses in Iraq. One in five refugees globally is Syrian, and 35 per cent of Syrians have been forced to move in the past four years.[10]

Today, Lebanon and Jordan are the two Arab countries that host the vast majority of these refugees. Turkey is the only, non-Arab, country to host more (see figure 2.4). Around 1.1 million Syrians and 8000 Iraqis were registered with the United Nations in Lebanon; and 640 000 Syrians and 30 800 Iraqis were registered in Jordan as of January 2016.[11] Syrian refugees began arriving in Lebanon and Jordan in 2011—more than half are below the age of 18. Lebanon also bears the biggest burden in the region relative to its size, with the highest number (257) of refugees per 1000 inhabitants.[12] In Jordan, the flow of refugees increased from 2000 in 2011 to 38 000 four years later. Despite the construction of four refugee camps (Zaatari, Azraq, Mrajeeb al-Fhood and Cyber City), close to 80 per cent of the Syrian diaspora lives in host communities and makeshift settlements across the country.[13]

figures produced by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the total number of individuals and families displaced by ongoing conflicts, which are based on the registration of individuals and families with the organization. However, these figures do not include unregistered individuals who may have entered a country through informal networks or those who do not need UNHCR support. Other figures used include those of national organizations managing asylum seekers. See also the discussion in chapter 11, section III, in this volume.

[8] UNHCR, *World at War: Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2014* (UNHCR: Geneva, 2015).

[9] Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), 'Iraq: IDPs caught between a rock and a hard place as displacement crisis deepens', 30 June 2015.

[10] UNHCR (note 8).

[11] UNHCR, 'Syria regional refugee response: Lebanon', <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>; and UNHCR, 'Syria Regional Refugee Response: Jordan', accessed 13 Mar. 2016, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>.

[12] UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends, 2014* (UNHCR: Geneva, 2015).

[13] UNHCR, 'Syria regional refugee response: Jordan', <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>.

The scale of the forced displacements coupled with widespread political upheaval signal a historic turning point for the region, the likes of which have not been seen since the end of World War I. As international borders between Iraq and Syria have crumbled under the onslaught of IS, parties to the various conflicts are seeking to reshape state boundaries and ensure control of territories by targeting individuals and communities based solely on identity in what amount to acts of ethnic cleansing. The atrocities committed by IS against Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Mandaeans, Shia and Turkomans in Iraq, including mass murder and the enslavement of women, are just one example of the actions of various non-state actors in Syria and Iraq. Government forces in Syria are also complicit in acts of ethnic cleansing, as well as population transfers on the basis of religious or ethnic identity.[14] According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, the situation indicates that 'targeted human rights and humanitarian law violations conducted on discriminatory grounds, that is, geographic origin, religious, political or other perceived affiliation', are driving the displacement process.[15]

According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, attacks by the Syrian Government against densely populated areas and territories where the displaced have sought refuge 'evinces a strategy of terrorizing civilians', with the aim of making opposition-held areas unliveable and driving Syrians to areas held by the Government or out of the country.[16] Reports highlight another insidious and deliberate strategy of sectarian engineering—the replacement of one sectarian population group with another—in strategic areas such as Zabadani, where ferocious battles have taken place.[17]

These massive forced population movements represent a demographic undoing of the Sykes–Picot agreement: the British-French treaty that drew the borders of countries in the Arab Levant. Ongoing identity-based population displacements are not only reconstituting Syrian and Iraqi societies, but also affecting neighbouring countries, most notably Lebanon and Jordan. This process is dismantling the ethnic and sectarian diversity that has characterized these societies for millennia. It is also driving the militarization of society as some ethnic and sectarian communities seek to arm themselves for protection.[18]

[14] Yahya (note 2).

[15] UN General Assembly, Protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons: situation of internally displaced persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, Note by the Secretary-General, A/67/931, 15 July 2013.

[16] Human Rights Council, 'Oral update of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 16 June 2014.

[17] *Al Hayat*, [Captive soldiers and demographic change end the Zabadani truce], 16 Aug. 2015 (in Arabic).

[18] Yahya (note 2).

Concerns with identity are not limited to warring parties

In Lebanon and Jordan, national anxieties related to identity increasingly dominate policy and public discussions about the refugees, albeit in different ways. Policymakers and the populace at large are increasingly alarmed that the dramatic spike in the number of refugees fleeing into their countries is altering current demographics and undermining existing social orders. In Lebanon, the fear is that the predominantly Sunni Syrians will disrupt the delicate sectarian balance in the country. In Jordan, this concern focuses on questions of national origin.[19]

The Lebanese state officially recognizes 18 religious and ethnic communities, and a long-standing national pact among the country's political leadership distributes senior government posts among its key religious communities.[20] It is feared that dramatic changes in the demographic balance between communities could open the door for demands to reconsider the basis of this pact. This 'sectarian balance' concern also intersects in complex ways with Lebanon's experience with the protracted Palestinian refugee crisis. Eight decades after their arrival in Lebanon—as a short-term measure awaiting a political solution—Palestinians continue to reside in 12 refugee camps across the country.

The issue of national origin has also shaped Jordan's perspective on the refugee crisis. Established in the post-World War I era under the British Mandate, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, unlike Lebanon, granted full citizenship to the majority of Palestinians who fled to the country following the establishment of Israel in 1948 and again after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The monarchy has built its legitimacy around East Jordanian national identity. In time, it came to rely on a delicate balance between the interests of East Bank Jordanian tribes and Jordanians of Palestinian origin. A central part of this balance is the assertion of a distinct Jordanian identity to counter proposals that the country become an alternative homeland for the Palestinians, as initially envisaged by the United Kingdom and advocates for the establishment of an Israeli state on Palestinian territory during the mandate period. Palestinians have also held on to their own distinct identity and their political right to return to their areas of origin. However, the arrival of large numbers of Syrian refugees, after major influxes of Iraqi refugees following the first (1990–91) and second (2003–11) Gulf wars, threatens to tilt the demographic balance away from East Jordanians even further. This has prompted increased concerns among East Bankers that they 'will become

[19] Yahya (note 2).

[20] Yahya, M., 'Taking out the trash: Lebanon's garbage politics', Syria in Crisis (blog), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 25 Aug. 2015.

minorities and guests in [their] own nation', according to a former member of Jordan's Parliament.[21]

Changing refugee policy in Jordan and Lebanon

Identity-related concerns were also key drivers of refugee policy in both countries. Lebanon and Jordan, neither of which has ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, initially adopted an open-door policy that welcomed refugees and generously provided varying degrees of access to health care and education services. In so doing, they spent considerable sums on care for incoming refugees. In 2015, the World Bank estimated that the refugee crisis has slowed Lebanon's GDP growth from 8 per cent in 2010 to 2 per cent, incurring losses of $13.1 billion or over 11 per cent of GDP.[22] It suggested that an additional $2.5 billion would be required for stabilization, that is, to reinstate access to and the quality of public services to their pre-Syrian-conflict level.[23] The World Bank also estimated that the refugee influx is costing Jordan $2.5 billion a year, amounting to 6 per cent of GDP and a quarter of government annual revenue.[24]

As the conflict escalated, leading to a dramatic increase in the number of individuals seeking refuge, Syria's neighbours have hardened their refugee policies. The initial open-door and humanitarian approach has shifted to a narrower security agenda. Public narratives and official discourse on refugees in both Jordan and Lebanon no longer consider fleeing populations to be 'guests' but instead regard them as 'burdens' on their host communities and a potential security threat.

This hardening was most apparent in additional restrictions on the inflow of refugees, their residency conditions and their access to the labour market, which included new residency permit laws as well as extensive prohibitions on formal employment.[25] Meanwhile, a security mindset, coupled with a refusal to accord fleeing populations refugee status and rights, left refugees vulnerable to abuse and harassment with no recourse to justice. Reports of Syrian refugees being forcibly returned home due to 'security' concerns indicate that authorities are not upholding the principle of *non-refoulement*, which forbids the rendering of a victim of persecution to his or her persecutor.[26] Multiple human rights organizations have also documented the

[21] Author's interview with a former member of Jordan's parliament, Beirut, 17 Oct. 2015.

[22] UNOCHA, 'Lebanon overview', Feb. 2016.

[23] World Bank, 'Executive summary', *Lebanon: Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2013).

[24] World Bank Middle East and North Africa Region, *MENA Quarterly Economic Brief: The Economic Effects of War and Peace*, no. 6 (Jan. 2016), p.16.

[25] Dyke, J., 'Stranded Syrians at "serious risk" of losing refugee status in Lebanon', *IRIN*, 16 Mar. 2015.

[26] Human Rights Watch, 'Lebanon: Syrian forcibly returned to Syria', 7 Nov. 2014.

different forms of exploitation that refugees face.[27] These include a constant fear of arrest, mistreatment by employers or proprietors, and the denial of health care and education to children. Limited access to resources and living in fear of arrest force many refugees to make choices that can prejudice their futures, including becoming involved in illicit activities such as the drug trade and sex trafficking.[28]

These policy changes sought to address a number of key challenges that emerged as a result of the prolongation of the crisis. They also tried to appease negative public sentiment over the perceived impact of the presence of refugees on public services and access to the labour market. Such negativity has emerged from several interrelated factors.

The majority of Syrian refugees have gravitated towards the most impoverished areas of Lebanon and Jordan, which over time has generated competition for scarce resources between refugees and the poorest Lebanese and Jordanians. In Lebanon, the largest concentrations of refugees are in Akkar, Hermel and the Beqaa Valley, around the cities of Tripoli in the north and Tyre in the south, and in pockets of urban poverty such as Hay el-Sullum or in existing informal settlements such as Shatila. Close to 85 per cent of the refugees reside in areas where more than two-thirds of the population live below the national poverty line of $2.40 per day.[29] In Jordan, a similar pattern is apparent as three-quarters of refugees have settled in impoverished areas in the capital, Amman, as well as two other northern municipalities, Irbid and Mafraq, where 40–50 per cent of Jordan's poor reside.

Over time, this dramatic increase in population levels has exerted mounting pressure on existing infrastructure, generating tensions between once welcoming residents and incoming populations. However, while increased demand generated by the presence of large numbers of refugees has affected access to services, particularly health care, shelter and education, in reality the refugees have not so much caused the shortages as exacerbated structural challenges that both countries were already facing, linked to an economic downturn in both countries and deficient service delivery. The quality of available services has also deteriorated. For example, the dramatic increase in demand for education has led to students doing double shifts in schools, overcrowding, and higher teacher-pupil ratios.[30] Increased demand for shelter has also exacerbated pre-existing housing shortages. In Jordan, rents have risen almost six-fold in Mafraq and Ramtha, affecting the poorest

[27] Human Rights Watch (note 26).

[28] Frelick, B., 'Rot or die: Iraqi refugees in Lebanon', Human Rights Watch, 3 Dec. 2007.

[29] World Health Organization, 'Situation in Lebanon', *WHO Donor Snapshot: Lebanon* (Jan.–June 2014); and Government of Lebanon and United Nations, *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, 2015–16* (Dec. 2014).

[30] Based on author's discussions with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon and different stakeholders in Jordan during 2015 and 2016.

Jordanians who do not own housing, while in Lebanon rents have increased by around 400 per cent in some areas of Beirut.[31] Similarly, the arrival of refugees has increased demand for scarce water resources, causing a dramatic decline in the average daily supply for ordinary Jordanians, particularly in the northern municipalities that are hosting refugees, to just 30 litres per person—compared to the 80 litres considered essential by development standards.[32] Meanwhile, labour competition occurs mainly in the informal sector, such as seasonal agricultural or construction work, where the willingness of Syrians to accept lower wages has displaced Lebanese and Jordanian workers and put downward pressure on wages.[33] The significance of such competition is that it is occurring among the most marginalized members of society.

An expanding underclass

As a result of the refugee crisis, a massive number of people have been pushed to the fringes of society, where they remain in limbo, unable to move on with their lives. A new underclass of Arab citizens is emerging, spread across the four Arab countries, characterized by widespread poverty, particularly in urban areas, as well as tremendous upheavals in health, education and income. In Iraq and Syria, this consists of millions of impoverished IDPs. In Lebanon and Jordan, this new underclass brings together disadvantaged locals and incoming refugees.

The massive scale of internal displacement best captures the catastrophic reconfiguration of Iraqi and Syrian societies.[34] In Syria, the shifting nature and borders of the ongoing conflict and the surrender-or-starve policies of the regime and other parties to the conflict—which includes using barrel bombs and chemical weapons and besieging entire areas to prevent the entry of food, medicine and other essentials—have driven 7.6 million individuals from their homes.[35] As of June 2015, the conflict in Iraq had driven 3.1 million Iraqis to seek shelter elsewhere in the country.[36] Displaced populations have moved to camps constructed for them: informal settlements of makeshift and unsound structures on locations such as construction sites across

[31] International Labour Organization (ILO), Regional Office for the Arab States, *Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and their Employment Profile* (ILO: Beirut, 2013); and Mercy Corps, 'Mapping of host community-refugee tensions in Mafraq and Ramtha, Jordan', 8 May 2013.

[32] Mercy Corps, *Tapped out: Water Scarcity and Refugee Pressures in Jordan* (Mercy Corps: Portland, OR, Mar. 2014).

[33] Stave, S. E. and Hillesund, S., *Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Jordanian Labour Market* (International Labour Organization and FAFO: Beirut and Oslo, 2015).

[34] UNHCR, 'Internally Displaced People', [n.d.], <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c146.html>.

[35] Human Rights Council (note 16).

[36] Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (note 9).

the country. Reports indicate that due to the increasing transportation costs through conflict zones, the more destitute Syrians tend to move into informal settlements rather than official camps constructed in the north of the country or along the Turkish border.[37]

Living in a refugee camp is akin to living in a ghettoized community: precarious legal circumstances, no security of tenure, meagre infrastructure, physical insecurity and minimal access to services. The situation in informal settlements is even more perilous than in formal refugee camps, as water, sanitation and health care, housing and educational facilities are not monitored by UN agencies or NGOs. For example, in Syria about half of the informal settlements do not have access to functional latrines, and the drinking water is polluted, with the consequent risk of communicable diseases.[38]

Meanwhile, whether they are in camps, informal settlements or still in their homes, the entire populations of Syria and Iraq are suffering a catastrophic regression in development gains. In Syria, the unemployment rate increased from 14.9 per cent in 2011 to 57.7 per cent in 2014. In addition, close to 80 per cent of the population is now considered poor, and two-thirds are living in abject poverty, while more than 45 per cent of school aged Syrian children are estimated to be out of school, compared to pre-war levels of universal education and 90 per cent literacy.[39] About 6.3 million Syrians are highly vulnerable to food insecurity, while one in ten Syrian children suffer from malnutrition.[40]

Meanwhile, the contiguity of destitute refugees and the poorest of Lebanese and Jordanians is also expanding the size of vulnerable populations in both countries. One-third of Lebanese youth are now unemployed, a 50 per cent increase since 2011.[41] In Jordan, the indications are that the incidence of poverty has also expanded among vulnerable citizens as Syrian workers displace Jordanians in the informal sector. For the refugees the situation is also dire. Those residing in Lebanon have limited access to livelihoods and are dependent on aid for survival. Many must spend considerably more than they earn just to meet basic needs and are having to deplete their savings or rely on social networks of families and friends. In Lebanon, more than half are living in insecure conditions, one-third lack the necessary legal docu-

[37] REACH, *Displaced Syrians in Informal Settlements within Syria and in Neighbouring Countries*, Aug. 2014.

[38] REACH (note 37).

[39] Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR), *Alienation and Violence: Impact of Syria Crisis Report 2014* (Damascus: SCPR, 2015).

[40] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 'Syria crisis', Executive brief, Sep. 2014; and Yahya, M., 'Iraq's existential crisis: sectarianism is just part of the problem', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 6 Nov. 2014.

[41] UN News Center, 'The number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon surpasses one million: UN agency', 3 Apr. 2014.

ments to move freely, and 75 per cent are struggling to make ends meet.[42] Estimates suggest that Syrian labourers in Lebanon are earning significantly less than the minimum wage, and that 92 per cent are working informally without legal or social protection. Child labour is also obvious on the streets of the country.[43]

Meanwhile, two-thirds of Syrian refugees in Jordan are living below the country's monthly poverty line of 68 Jordanian dinars ($97) per person, and one in six refugee households lives on less than $40 per person.[44] In addition, one in ten resides in informal housing considered precarious, and close to half (47 per cent) of refugees live in housing assessed as bad.[45] A particularly adverse coping strategy is to remove children from school in order to find work that will generate income for the family.

A lost generation?

The situation is threatening the future of an entire generation of Syrian and Iraqi youth, who are growing up in the shadow of conflict and with minimal prospects for achieving a better future. Concerns are increasing over the most vulnerable of refugees: the children. In a recent interview in the Zaatari camp in Jordan, a young Syrian refugee responded to a question about the progress of the war in his country thus: 'I think we will not get freedom, Bashar will win'. He continued, 'My dream is we will win. But my second dream is . . . when I turn 16 or 18, I will go to Syria and join the jihad'.[46]

This is a tragic emblem of a lost generation of youth growing up in the shadow of conflict, for whom the consequences of war and protracted displacement are even more devastating. Many witnessed and have vivid memories of the violence and unimaginable horrors that touched their families and communities. They have lost their friends, their homes and their futures.

What compounds the tragedy of these children is their loss of education. Today, the Arab region is host to some 21 million children who are either out of school or at risk of dropping out of school. The great majority of those children are Syrian and Iraqi refugees or from displaced populations. For example, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that about

[42] UNHCR, 'Syrian refugees: Inter-agency regional update', 19 Mar. 2015.

[43] ILO (note 31), p. 27.

[44] The monthly sum of 68 Jordanian dinars per person is the minimum needed for survival, below which individuals cannot meet their basic needs for food and non-food items; see UNHCR, Living in the Shadows: Jordan Home Visits Report 2014 [n.d.], <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>.

[45] Precarious settings include tents, caravans, basements and rooftops. UNHCR (note 44).

[46] MacKinnon, M., 'Why young Syrian refugees will haunt the Mideast for decades to come', *Globe and Mail*, 14 Sep. 2013.

2.8 million Syrian children and about 50 per cent of Syrian refugees aged 6 to 17 were not in school in 2014.[47]

This education deficit is catastrophic on multiple fronts. For children and youth, the absence of education represents a lost future. Without basic reading or arithmetic skills, children and youth have limited options for gainful employment or earning a livelihood. Critically, educational response plans lack initiatives for those aged 14 to 25—the age at which boys transition to adulthood and seek options to shape their future.

In times of war, education also helps keep children and youth out of the conflict. In a recent analysis of the different reasons given by Syrian children for joining combat, in addition to being tortured at the hands of government forces, following friends and family members into combat, participating in political protests and needing jobs, two other specific reasons stand out. The first is the lack of educational opportunities because they live in embattled areas with no schools, or because they were expelled from school for political reasons. The second is recruitment in refugee camps.[48]

While the size of the problem is difficult to quantify, the horrors witnessed by these children and the continuing traumas they are enduring place them at an increasing risk of recruitment by the warring parties. As Jane MacPhail, a UNICEF child-protection specialist, noted in 2013, the Zaatari camp is 'a fertile ground for the recruitment of young people'. She added, 'If we don't get to these kids now, they will lose not only their sense of values, but their sense of hope'.[49]

The failing international response

Political deadlock at the international level, particularly in the UN Security Council, has allowed the prolongation and escalation of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Different regional and international actors are backing a wide variety of local groups on the ground, while diplomatic efforts best embodied in the Geneva process have yet to bear fruit.[50] This has tilted the scales in favour of military and security options for dealing with the unfolding conflicts, including the US-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIL and Russian military action in support of the Syrian regime.

The cessation of hostilities remained fragile at the end of 2015 and the prospects for long-term peace depend on a large number of factors, not least

[47] UNICEF, *No Place for Children: The Impact of Five Years of War on Syria's Children and their Childhood* (UNICEF: Amman, 14 Mar. 2016).

[48] Human Rights Watch, 'Maybe we live and maybe we die: recruitment and use of Syrian children in armed combat', 22 June 2014, p. 13.

[49] MacKinnon (note 46).

[50] The UN-backed international peace conferences on Syria held in Geneva between 2012 and 2014.

agreements between international and regional power brokers, particularly the United States, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran. To avoid the potential of future conflict, any political settlement will also need to include confidence-building mechanisms between the warring parties while addressing the future status of Assad. It also needs to seriously consider the role of local governance mechanisms that have emerged in rebel held areas as potential peace brokers in their regions. Meanwhile, the large funding gap in humanitarian and development assistance to both refugees and host communities is expected to be addressed by pledges from the donor community at a conference to be held in London in February 2016.

Conclusions

The reverberations of the Syria conflict, of which the refugee crisis is the most visible and painful, will not end with the cessation of hostilities. The fallout from the crisis will affect the region for decades to come. The massive population movements and the interim population transfers that have already taken place mean that reconstituting social cohesion in Syria will face colossal challenges. Meanwhile, neighbouring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan will need to rapidly adjust their policies to actively engage with the challenges of dealing with a dramatic increase in their resident populations along with the political and socio-economic challenges that this is generating. Essentially, both countries need to actively think through how they can transform a seeming burden into an opportunity, by considering how to generate growth, diversify its sources and expand employment opportunities. For European countries that have witnessed a large inflow of refugees, considerable effort needs to be expended on a more active role in bringing an end to the Syrian conflict.

Overcoming the regression in development indicators generated by conflict and war will also take decades, as will addressing the needs of a generation that has been traumatized by tremendous loss. This will require significant efforts and a broad range of partnerships between international donors and agencies and with regional and national governments. However, the human devastation in Syria extends beyond the colossal loss of life and livelihoods, to include the dramatic outflow of its middle class and professionals, which constitutes a devastating loss for current and future prospects for rebuilding the county. More significantly perhaps, the bonds of trust between societal groups have also been broken, with dire consequences for social cohesion and the management of societal diversity.

Given the fragmentation of the political landscape in Syria today and the multitude of local, regional and international actors involved in the conflict, the prospects for return for refugees will to a large extent depend on the shape of the political settlement to end the conflict. Ultimately, for any

political settlement to be sustainable, it will need to include some measure of justice for those whose lives have been destroyed as well as guarantees of safety for those wishing to return.