

## Responsibility-Sharing for Refugees in the Middle East and North Africa

This Delmi report focuses on responsibility sharing for refugees and other displaced persons in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). It analyses the perspectives on responsibility-sharing at three levels: Firstly, policymakers as communicated in official statements. Secondly, the practitioners working at the field level and thirdly the lived experience of refugees and IDPs. The aim of the report, written by Susan Martin et al, has been to move from the rhetoric of ‘responsibility-sharing’ to rather address the reality on the ground and thereby reveal the gaps in the system

### 1. Why Responsibility-Sharing?

Responsibility-sharing for refugees is a core tenet of international responses to large scale displacement crises. It is essential because the burdens associated with protecting and assisting refugees and displaced persons are unequally placed. Where refugees go is often an accident of geography. States that are in close proximity to countries in conflict are often called upon to host far larger numbers of refugees than are those that are farther from the insecurity that generates large-scale displacement.

National authorities have the principal responsibility to provide asylum, but the international community should cooperate with governments that faced an unduly heavy burden in carrying out their responsibilities. In the New York Declaration adopted at the High Level Meeting Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants in September 2016, governments reaffirmed their commitment to this notion. The challenge is to identify the various ways in which governments, civil society and those who have been displaced can cooperate in responding and finding solutions that are beneficial to all parties.

## 2. Why the Middle East and North Africa?

The history, politics, and culture of the MENA region have been defined by the presence of refugees and displaced persons for much of the past 70 years. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of the end of 2015, countries in the MENA region hosted more than 18 million refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons (IDPs). There is a wide range of nationalities of people who have sought refuge in the MENA region, including Syrians, Iraqis, Sudanese, South Sudanese, Somalis, Yemenis, Ethiopians, Eritreans, and others (UNHCR 2016). In addition, there are 5.1 million Palestinian refugees registered with the UN Relief and Works Administration (UNRWA) in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank and Gaza (UNRWA 2016).

Displacement in the MENA region presents significant challenges, foremost to the refugees and internally displaced persons but also to host countries, humanitarian and development organizations, and the broader international community. The number of refugees and IDPs is too large, and these challenges are too great, to be met effectively by any one country, group or organization. Rather, the concerted efforts of all actors are required to prevent, respond and find

solutions to displacement in the region.

This study focuses on five countries with large numbers of refugees and displaced persons: Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey. For this analysis, we drew upon official statements issued at the UN High Level Meeting Addressing Large Scale Movements of Refugees and Migrants; 34 interviews with service providers and other actors in the MENA region in 2016, with particular focus on refugee-led organizations; and more than 300 interviews of Syrian, Iraqi, Palestinian, Sudanese, and Somali refugees collected between 2010, 2014 and 80 interviews of internally displaced Iraqis collected in 2016.

## 3. Policy Recommendations

The study reviews perspectives on responsibility-sharing at three key levels: 1) the perspectives of policymakers as communicated in official statements; 2) the views of practitioners working at the field level, and 3) the lived experience of refugees and IDPs themselves. There are great similarities in their views as to the areas that require more effective collaboration and that would benefit from more engagement by the international community. At the same time, the emphases differ based on the impacts and experiences of the actors assessing the needs and opportunities for responsibility-sharing. Not

surprisingly, the perspectives of policymakers in the MENA region coincide with the pledges made in the New York Declaration, which was endorsed by these same states. Perhaps more revealing, practitioners and the refugees and displaced persons echo many of the same points made in the Declaration while raising gaps in current approaches, making this study of significant policy relevance in the following seven areas:

### **3.1 Address the Underlying Causes of Displacement**

All actors emphasize that the best response to refugee and IDP crises is to resolve the main causes of displacement. This is consistent with the 2016 New York Declaration's commitment to address the root causes of the crisis. The refugees and IDPs interviewed were most vocal in expressing these sentiments. Returning to their home countries was paramount for many people, but almost all stated that they would not go back if the conflicts continue. A less beneficial return is of those who are returning to fight. Setting up programs in host countries and communities that target young men for employment and socialization, in particular, would be a significant way that the humanitarian aid community could keep young men from the battlefield and assist in de-escalating conflict. Such programs would

provide alternatives to men who return home and become paid soldiers out of desperation and despair

### **3.2 Promote resettlement of refugees**

Many of the refugee respondents, particularly those facing protracted displacement, saw moving to a third country as the key to their future. And while perhaps highly unrealistic about how difficult life is in exile, the search for a future with dignity and with justice is what drives many on this path. Recognizing that formal resettlement is safer and more orderly than irregular movements, there was consensus among all actors that resettlement of refugees to third countries must be part of any responsibility-sharing schema. This was also reflected in the New York Declaration.

### **3.3 Promote greater self-sufficiency for refugees through development initiatives**

In the short- to medium-term, while more long-lasting solutions are found, there were calls to shift the response to the regional refugee crisis from a mostly humanitarian approach to a more development-oriented programming that focused, for example, on livelihoods, education,

and capacity-building rather than emergency food aid or shelter. However, humanitarian needs must be balanced with a transition to more sustainable levels of development programming. Protection, particularly from refoulement (forcible return home) is a further imperative and must accompany both humanitarian and development approaches. Stakeholders, refugees and IDPs, and some governments articulated a need to increase the access of refugees and IDPs to jobs and schooling in host countries. They called on host countries and the international community to address legal and practical barriers to legal employment. Facilitate the legal movement of refugees to countries in which they could work and learn is another way to increase self-sufficiency. On the other hand, for labour migration programs to work, access to economic opportunities must be better balanced with refugee protection.

### **3.4 Encourage host, transit, and source countries to address ongoing protection problems facing refugees and IDPs**

Challenges in protection beyond refoulement emerged clearly in stakeholder interviews and the experiences recounted by refugees and IDPs. Service providers discuss the physical safety of

refugees, particularly those from parts of Africa, who experience daily violence and extreme levels of harassment, discrimination, due in large part to their visibility. In the view of stakeholders and refugees, the international community could play an important role in advocating for greater safety and security for refugees in host countries through the exercise of humanitarian diplomacy, financial resources and technical assistance.

### **3.5 Provide timely, appropriate, and adequate financing**

Governments and stakeholders in the principal host countries made a strong case for additional support for both the displaced populations and affected host communities. Refugees and IDPs made an equally strong case that they need more resources to survive. Because the host countries are poor and the refugees and IDPs could bring little with them, financing humanitarian assistance remains the principal way in which the international community can share the responsibility for the displaced populations as well as the host population. Correcting imbalances in aid—between refugees and IDPs and among different refugee and IDP populations—would enable more equitable and effective responses to all humanitarian needs.

### **3.6 Make operational improvements in aid programs**

Recommendations on ways that the international community could join together to improve the implementation of humanitarian assistance operations include: facilitating use of micro-credit and reducing costs of remittances; encouraging investment in host countries; providing financial and material support to private households that assist refugees and IDPs; improving coordination of assistance among international organizations and nongovernmental organizations and between these entities and national and local organizations; and reducing duplicative paperwork requirements while facilitating sharing and analysis of data among agencies and with beneficiaries of programs.

### **3.7 Provide technical assistance and training to build the capacity of local actors**

Capacity building is required at every stage and among all actors involved in assistance and protection of refugees and IDPs. Priority should go to technical assistance and training of local organizations, with special initiatives for refugee and IDP-led organizations. Although there has been growth in professional education for humanitarian

aid workers, many of those who join agencies have not had formal training. Responsibility-sharing means providing those who are working with refugees and IDPs the sectoral, management, policy, evaluation and other skills they need to succeed.

## **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, moving from the rhetoric of ‘responsibility-sharing’ to address the reality on the ground will not come easily and will require that all actors work together to protect and assist the most vulnerable. Pieces of this course of action can be seen in MENA countries already, as agencies have been compelled to collaborate and innovate given the scale of the refugee situation. At the same time, our interviews with stakeholders and refugees/IDPs reveal major gaps in the system. The international community appears cognizant of these challenges, as witnessed by the commitments made in the New York Declaration. Filling the gaps will take more than a declaration, or even a compact on responsibility-sharing, much as those are welcomed. To make responsibility-sharing real requires true collaboration, changes in policies and practice from the donors to the implementers, and approaches that will empower refugees and IDPs to become part of the solution by fostering their capacities and giving them opportunities they need and deserve.



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