The Impact of Border Externalization and Militarization in the Middle East

Results from Phase 1 of the project

Border Externalization and Militarization: A Global Analysis

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This report contains the results from Phase 1 of the Project Border Externalization and Militarization: A Global Analysis. The research was commissioned by the AFSC International Programs Just Migration Thematic Hub/ Lead, and highlights the results of research that was conducted by AFSC to critically examine the global impact of border externalization and militarization on people on the move, border, transit and impacted communities.

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CAUSES OF MIGRATION

The Middle East is a region of complexities that has been significantly impacted by migration dynamics. These dynamics have been shaped by a range of factors, including ongoing civil wars and regional conflicts, foreign military interventions, economic disparities, increasing environmental degradation, and demographic shifts. Over the past two decades, the region has experienced unprecedented levels of forced displacement and irregular migration.

Migratory movements in the Middle East are everyday practices. The region has the highest density of forced displaced people in the world. Based on UNCHR 2024 data, 15.8 million individuals, including stateless persons, have been displaced in the Middle East and North Africa, accounting for 12% of global displaced people[1]. 2.3 million out of 15.8 million are seeking refugee outside the region in almost 131 countries around the world[2].

More than a decade after the outbreak of the crisis, Syria continues to be the world's largest refugee crisis, with over 12 million forcibly displaced persons, including 7.2 million internally displaced since 2011[3]. Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon have been the most affected by the refugee crisis in the region, hosting over 5.3 million Syrian refugees[4].

- Turkey remains the world's largest refugee-hosting country in the world, with over 4.6 million regular migrants[5], including 3.1 million registered Syrian refugees[6].

- Jordan follows with over 730,000 registered refugees[7].

- Lebanon has the highest number of refugees per capita in the world, with an estimated 1.5 million refugees according to the government[8].

Over two decades ago, the US invasion of Iraq has created widespread violence, internal displacement, and the emergence of insurgent groups that have forced millions of Iraqis to be internally and externally displaced in neighboring countries. The sectarian violence worsened the situation, leading to increased internal displacement and refugee flows. As of 2024, Iraq has an internally displaced population of 1.14 million people and hosts over 300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in the region[9]. Of these, more than 90% are Syrians, totaling around 270,000 individuals.

Since 2015, millions of Yemenis have been displaced due to war and conflict involving proxy groups, making this the world's most severe humanitarian crisis. According to UNHCR, more than 4.3 million people have been displaced internally and 23 million people require humanitarian assistance, making it as the fourth largest population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world due to conflict[10].

The displacement of millions of Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories are not included in statistics provided by UNHCR and IOM. According to UNRWA, the UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestinian Refugees, there are approximately 6 million Palestinian refugees displaced both within and outside of Palestine due to ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. About 1.5 million registered Palestinian refugees reside in 58 recognized Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank, including eastern Jerusalem[11]. Since October 2023, more than 31 thousand people have been killed and around 75 thousand have been wounded in Gaza by the Israeli occupation forces[12].

Moreover, the increasing environmental degradation in the region is another pressing-issue on the displacement of people, compounded with existing political and socio-economic instabilities. Water scarcity, drought, food insecurity and extreme weather events in the region are making life even more difficult and pushing more people onto existing migration routes. According to Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), more than 230 thousand people were internally displaced by disasters in the MENA region in 2021, mostly due to climate-related disasters[13]. The IOM in Iraq documented the displacement of over 130 thousand people in September 2023 due to adverse effects of climate change, particularly in southern parts of the country[14]. Environmental challenges and poor governance in Yemen, Syria and Lebanon could exacerbate vulnerability and spark conflict over resources, leading to further displacement of people.

Foreign Military Interventions

The current influx of refugees from the Levant can largely be attributed to the repercussions of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the ensuing civil war, which resulted in approximately 6 million refugees and a similar number of internally displaced persons

[15]. This ethnic and sectarian change entailed tensions across the region, fueling extremist factions and placing immense strain on the infrastructure of neighboring states like Jordan and Syria. Consequently, international organizations have become integral to the daily governance of these displaced populations.

These regional dynamics also shaped the impact of the Arab Spring on Syria, leading to an unprecedented refugee crisis, with over 6 million Syrians fleeing the country and another 10 million internally displaced[16]. While the focus often remains on the Syrian crisis, other parallel catastrophes, such as the ongoing conflict in Yemen, have also generated significant displacement.[17] Despite obstacles like naval blockades, internal displacement in Yemen remains staggering. The implications of these refugee populations extend beyond regional security.

Ongoing Civil Wars and Regional Conflicts

From 2005 to 2015, the Middle East witnessed a significant surge in the number of displaced migrants, increasing fourfold from approximately 5 million to around 23 million[18]. This

substantial rise can largely be attributed to ongoing conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen during this period.[20] [19]

The civil conflict in Syria, which has been the primary cause of human displacement in the Middle East for the past decade, has fundamentally altered the region and forced millions of people to flee their homes without the possibility of a safe return. [20]

The underlying circumstances such as repression, regime violence, and sectarian and religious divisions that initially drove people to flee remain largely unchanged. Since 2011, this situation has fueled regional insecurity and influenced domestic politics in various host countries, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey[21].

Economic Disparities

Wars in the Middle East have triggered a devastating domino effect. Not only did these conflicts cause immense human suffering and destroy infrastructure, but they also crippled economies. Countries like Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen plummet into recession, inflation soars, and governments struggle financially[22]. The damage is not contained within borders. Neighboring nations like Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey experience spillover effects – increased refugees, a shaky security situation, and a decline in social trust[23]. This weakens institutions and makes it harder for these countries to enact crucial economic reforms. The impact even reaches beyond the region, affecting Europe and other parts of the world. [24]

Environmental Degradation

In the upcoming decades, the impacts of climate change will exacerbate the existing causes that drive individuals to flee their home regions or countries due to conflicts. Factors such as droughts, rising sea levels, food insecurity resulting from crop failures, and desertification will further contribute to displacement.[25]

MIGRATION PATHWAYS

Since the onset of the conflict in Syria in 2011, the Eastern Mediterranean route, which migrants have historically used to traverse from Turkey to the European Union, has experienced increasing congestion. Additionally, Syrian migration routes have begun to intersect with the easternmost parts of an East African migratory route under the Mediterranean Sea[26].

In 2020, arrivals through the Eastern Mediterranean route saw a nearly 98% decrease compared to 2015, but there was an increase in numbers in 2021 and 2022. The agreement with Turkey played a key role in reducing the loss of lives at sea and combating migrant smugglers[27].

The Eastern Mediterranean route, considered the second most utilized route by smugglers, has undergone significant evolution over time. This route has seen a growing significance in arrivals by sea from Turkey to the shores of Italy, Greece, and Cyprus, compared to land border crossings between Turkey and neighboring EU countries like Greece and Bulgaria[28].

Primarily, asylum seekers from Syria and Palestine have utilized the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route. Migration routes into Europe continually shift as smugglers adapt their tactics to evade enforcement and border patrols[29]. Their methods vary depending on regional factors, the effectiveness of national authorities' preventive measures, and the needs of migrants who pay for their services[30].

Initially, irregular migrant departures from Turkey to the EU via the Mediterranean were predominantly directed towards the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea. This pattern gradually changed, with irregular migrant flows shifting towards the Italian Ionian shores. Departure locations varied, but many migrants departed from the vicinity of the Turkish port of Mersin[31].

Turkey has become a primary destination for refugees attempting to cross into Europe. Each year, hundreds of thousands of migrants flee civil conflict or economic hardship in their home countries, hoping to reach Europe[32]. Some manage to undertake the perilous journey over land or sea with the assistance of smugglers, who often abandon them, particularly during sea crossings, after receiving significant sums of money from each migrant[33]. Others are intercepted by Turkish security forces before they can cross into Europe[34].

RISK AND CHALLENGES

In the aftermath of conflicts, although the intensity of warfare has somewhat diminished, the pervasive destruction of housing and infrastructure, economic downturns, and persistent threat of violence continue to foster a profound sense of despair among populations, propelling them towards seizing any available opportunity, however perilous, to seek refuge elsewhere.

This trend is particularly pronounced in Syria, where poverty rates have soared to alarming levels, reaching 90 percent[35]. Lebanon faces a confluence of economic collapse and heightened instability, raising apprehensions about a potential surge in emigration[36]. Hosting 1.5 million Syrian refugees' further strains Lebanon's resources and adds to the pool of individuals contemplating onward migration[37].

Turkey, a pivotal player in the region for hosting Syrian refugees, may encounter increased attempts by migrants to transit through its territory enroute to Europe. Turkey's past use of migration as a diplomatic lever underscores the importance of its policies, especially amidst its ongoing financial challenges[38].

The COVID-19 pandemic and the specter of climate change are global phenomena, influencing migration patterns in the region. COVID-19 has complicated cross-border

movement and exacerbated economic pressures, while climate change intensifies environmental crises like prolonged droughts and water scarcity, already prompting internal migration and likely to fuel further displacement[39].

Years of conflict, political instability, economic downturns, unemployment, and systemic corruption have convinced a significant portion of the youth that their prospects lie beyond their home communities and even their national borders. Some will seek relocation within the region, while others will resort to perilous journeys, often at great cost, in pursuit of refuge in Europe or elsewhere[40].

Should the prevailing sense of hopelessness persist or worsen in 2022, the region faces heightened risks of migration crises. Governments must brace for increased migration flows while concurrently striving to foster stability and opportunity for their young populations[41].

States' Role

The Middle East has always been a significant part of a larger global migration pattern, with countries in the region often representing points of origin, transit and destination. However, the phenomenon of migration has become one of the defining features of the Middle East with the displacement of millions of people following the civil conflict in Syria in 2011 in what has been described by the UNHCR as the "largest refugee crisis in the world". In response, the neighboring countries, such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, have implemented various legal, political and socio-economic policies to manage the increasing refugee crisis.

Initially, Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon followed an open-door policy and humanitarian approach, permitting Syrian refugees to cross their borders, with the assumption that the crisis would be temporary[42]. However, as Syria's war dragged on and the number of refugees surged, these countries adapted their policies to address the growing challenges in the long term. They have shifted from an open door-policy and humanitarian approach to a more restrictive policy. This shift has involved closing borders to prevent new arrivals and institutionalizing their response through more structured and sometimes restrictive policies.

Moreover, some **countries in the MENA, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Tunisia and Morocco** have constructed sophisticated fences along their border in response the rise of mass migrations and non-state actors have put unprecedented pressure on the existing nation-state borders[43].

As countries in the region grapple with their domestic political interests, economic crisis and foreign policy objectives, they have adopted different approaches to refugee governance, influenced by their unique social and political contexts and interactions with regional and global actors[44].

The refugee crisis in the Middle East went beyond the borders of the region and turned into a global refugee crisis. In 2015, with over 1.5 million refugees crossing dangerous migration routes from both the Middle East and Africa and reaching European borders,

Europe experienced the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. Thus, **migration issues have become central between the EU and the countries in the region with the EU outsourcing and strengthening its border controls to other countries.**

The European Union's border control regime was significantly reshaped by the migration crisis, particularly after 2015. The crisis highlighted the difficulties presented by irregular migration through the Mediterranean and Balkans, resulting in a more coordinated EU approach to external border management. This involved increased collaboration with third countries to prevent irregular migration and enhance border control effectiveness. Key developments included the strengthening of Frontex, the EU's external border agency, and the adoption of a more integrated approach to border management. This approach emphasizes shared responsibility among EU Member States and closer operational ties with neighboring third countries. The aim of these changes is to enhance the EU's capacity to respond to migration pressures while maintaining the integrity of the Schengen area and upholding EU norms and policies. This period represented a significant development in the EU's approach to externalizing borders, striking a balance between the necessity for effective border control and the commitment to international and EU legal standards.

As part of its border externalization policy, the EU signed a refugee deal with Turkey in March 2016 in order to address the unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants into the EU, particularly through the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes. The deal aimed to prevent and control the irregular migration to the EU and combat human trafficking. In return, Turkey would get financial aid to manage and improve the living conditions of Syrian refugees in the country.

In the framework of so-called 'stabilization' policies, the European Union (EU) is supporting the Lebanese security forces in their border management tasks, both along the border with Syria and in Lebanese territorial waters[45]. In addition, EU countries are also in cooperation with Lebanon against human trafficking. However, there are growing concerns that the Lebanese authorities, with the support of the EU and European states, have repeatedly violated human rights. This is in the context of the increasing externalization of European borders in Lebanon[46].

As part of Global Compact on Refugees, which was signed in 2018 and includes some countries from the Middle East and Africa, the EU and Jordan signed an agreement called "the Jordan Compact", aiming to prevent onward (potentially to Europe) refugee movements by providing financial aid to Jordanian government and investing in Jordanian labor market creating work opportunities for Syrian refugees[47].

Thus, how states respond to the refugee crisis has become both complex and contested as the crisis crossed the borders of nation states involving the EU and other key actors such the UN.

Although there are many countries experiencing refugee crises in the Middle East, such as Iraq, Yemen and Palestine; **Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan will be used as examples to illustrate regional dynamics as the most exposed to refugee crisis and host the largest number of refugees.**

THE CASE OF TURKEY

Turkey has become one of the largest hosts of refugees globally, giving shelter to over 3.6 million registered refugees mainly from Syria[48]. The country's migration policy has undergone significant changes over the years. Initially, Turkey had an open-door policy for Syrian refugees, providing temporary protection that did not grant full refugee status but ensured some level of safety and basic services. Under the management of the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), Turkey has established 'Temporary Accommodation Centers' across the border towns and permitted Syrians to reside in different cities to promote integration and economic contribution.

The Temporary Protection (TP) regime ensures that beneficiaries of temporary protection have access to various rights, services, and assistance. These include health care, education, social assistance, psychological support, and the labor market.

However, the country has encountered challenges in providing employment opportunities to refugees, resulting in many working in the informal economy. The EU-Turkey agreements of 2015 and 2016 signified a significant change, as Turkey committed to controlling the flow of migration towards Europe in exchange for financial aid and political concessions from the EU[49]. This relationship has been intricate, with both sides accusing each other of failing to meet the agreement's terms, but it has significantly influenced Turkey's migration policy.

Policy Responses and EU-Turkey Refugee Agreement

Temporary Protection Regime: Turkey introduced a Temporary Protection Regime to provide legal status to Syrian refugees, offering them access to basic services such as health and education while ensuring their non-refoulement.

Integration Efforts: Efforts were made to integrate Syrian refugees into Turkish society through language courses, vocational training, and employment opportunities. This was aimed at facilitating self-reliance among the refugee population and mitigating the social and economic impacts of displacement.

EU-Turkey Refugee Deal: In March 2016, Turkey and the EU reached an agreement aimed at stopping the flow of refugees to Europe in exchange for financial aid, visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, and revitalized EU accession talks. The deal included the return of irregular migrants from Greece to Turkey and the resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey to the EU on a one-for-one basis.

Border Security Measures and Military Interventions: Turkey strengthened its border security to prevent irregular migration and combat 'cross-border terrorism', including constructing wall and fences along parts of its border with Syria. Turkey has also launched several military operations into Syria, resulting in controlling the lands across the border together with Syrian opposition groups.

International Cooperation and Burden-Sharing: Turkey advocated for a more equitable sharing of responsibilities and resources in addressing the refugee crisis, calling for increased international support and cooperation.

Local Integration and Social Cohesion: Policies were developed to promote social cohesion between Turkish host communities and Syrian refugees, addressing challenges such as competition for resources, cultural differences, and xenophobia.

Sustainable Solutions: Turkey has been involved in diplomatic efforts aimed at finding a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict, recognizing that the resolution of the crisis is key to addressing the root causes of displacement. Turkey has announced several times its willingness to normalize its relations with the Syrian regime to reach political solutions and thus solve the migration crisis[50].

However, there are grooving concerns by human rights organizations over the violation of refugee rights in the country, calling the EU to recognize Turkey as 'unsafe' for asylum seekers. Human Rights Watch reports on the arrest, detention and the increased number of deportations by the Turkish authorities[51].

THE CASE OF LEBANON

Given its geographical proximity to Syria, Lebanon currently hosts the highest number of displaced persons per capita in the world, one-fifth is Syrian refugee, placing an unprecedented strain on its socio-economic infrastructure and exacerbating existing political and sectarian tensions[52]. According to the UNCHR, 9 out of 10 Syrian refugees need humanitarian support to meet their basic needs, while over 50 percent of the whole population live under poverty line[53].

Regulative-Restrictive Shift: In late 2014, Lebanon shifted towards more regulative governance by enacting stricter border management and reception policies to control the flow of Syrian refugees. The aim of this shift was to address demographic concerns and the lack of a national strategy to cope with the refugee crisis[54].

Lack of Integration Policies: Lebanon has refrained from creating policies focused on refugee protection and integration, largely due to capacity constraints, the country's delicate sectarian balance, and lessons learned from past experiences with Palestinian refugees[55].

International Negotiations for Support: The Lebanese government has searched and demanded for increased international financial support to tackle the refugee crisis, stressing the need to move from purely humanitarian assistance to development assistance that benefits both refugees and vulnerable Lebanese communities experiencing deep socio-economic crisis.

Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP): The LCRP was developed collaboratively with the UN and other partners to address humanitarian needs and reinforce Lebanon's economic, social, and institutional stability. It aimed to assist not only Syrian refugees but also vulnerable

Lebanese and Palestinian populations, reflecting a more comprehensive approach to the crisis[56].

Socio-economic Integration: The increasing concerns about the socio-economic integration of refugees have gradually portrayed refugees as an economic burden over the resources which could exacerbate existing tensions between refugees and host communities.

Sectarian Balance and National Identity: The influx of refugees into Lebanon has raised concerns about potentially altering the country's sectarian balance, a crucial aspect of Lebanon's identity and politics[57]. While Shi's parties, such as Hezbollah, has maintained the principle of openness policy and has avoided any sectarian bias in addressing the refugee issue, Christian-based political parties have raised concerns over the refugee policy and called for stricter border policy, describing refuges as a threat to national identity[58].

Lebanon's migration governance cannot be separated from the EU's border externalization policy. The EU's support to border enforcement in Lebanon not only strengthens Lebanese border control, but also contributes to the externalization of European borders, shifting the burden and consequences of migration control to neighboring countries like Lebanon, often at the expense of human rights and international law obligations[59].

THE CASE OF JORDAN

Historically, Jordan has been a refugee heaven in the Middle East since the Palestinian exodus of 1948. In addition to Palestinians, Jordan has been hosting about 730 thousand migrants from Iraq, Yemen Sudan and Somalia[60]. Migrants, particularly Palestinians have always played a crucial role in influencing the country's political and socio-economic landscape. In the aftermath of the civil war in Syria, Jordan currently hosts more than 650 thousand Syrian refugees as of September 2023[61].

Initially, Jordan's policy was shaped by its social ties with the Syrian community, which allowed for a more flexible approach to receiving and protecting refugees. However, like other host countries, Jordan has shifted its emergency-based humanitarian approach to a more regulative and restrictive border policy as the war has dragged on. Several factors influenced this shift, including Jordan's economic burden of refugee influx, international development concerns, and memories and political legacies of past experiences with Palestinian and Iraqi refugees[62]. Security-based structured and restrictive border policy has extended refugee camps and urban areas, raising the concerns over human rights in refugee protection[63].

Coordinated by UNCHR and in collaboration with international and local NGOs, and community-based organization, Jordan has initiated a Jordan Response Plan (JRP) to address the immediate humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees while also focusing on the longer-term developmental goals of the country[64].

The Jordan Response Plan (JRP) for the Syrian crisis is an example of a unified strategy that combines refugee assistance with resilience-building measures. The plan aims to strengthen the resilience of national systems and institutions, meet the urgent needs of both refugees and Jordanians affected by the crisis, and improve job and livelihood opportunities[65]. The statement shows that Jordan is committed to integrating the management of the refugee crisis into its broader development agenda, in line with its national development strategies.

The Role of Non-State Actors and Community-Based Organizations

H In the Middle East, non-state actors play a critical role in the migration landscape due to the complex political, social, and economic environments. These actors include a wide range of organizations, such as international NGOs, local civil society groups, and informal networks that often step in to fill the gaps left by state institutions. Their roles can vary from providing humanitarian aid and legal assistance to migrants and refugees, to advocacy and policy influencing at national and regional levels. In politicized contexts in the Middle East, given the region's history of conflicts, political instability, and displacement, non-state actors often face unique challenges in relation to criminalization of migrants. They operate in environments where access to affected populations can be restricted due to security concerns, bureaucratic hurdles, or political sensitivities. Moreover, these actors have to navigate the geopolitics of the region, where their actions can sometimes be perceived as politically motivated, impacting their ability to operate effectively.

The externalization policies and security concerns of the nation-states in the region under the pretext of national security and combating irregular migration are often resulted in the criminalization of migrants and organizations working on migration, undermining of basic human rights, violate good governance, create immobility and contribute to the crisis of the global refugee regime, which fails to provide protection[66].

This criminalization not only undermines the humanitarian efforts of these organizations but also further marginalizes vulnerable migrant and refugee populations, limiting their access to essential services and protection.

The situation is exacerbated by the geopolitical dynamics of the region, where conflict and instability complicate migration patterns and the work of civil society and community-based organizations. The net effect is a shrinking civic space and an erosion of rights for both the organizations and the individuals they seek to assist, highlighting a worrying trend in the governance of migration and the protection of human rights in the region.

Human rights organizations and associations raised concerns over the EU-Turkey Refugee Deal: Amnesty International has called the EU several times to put an immediate stop to its plans to send asylum seekers back to Turkey under the false pretext that it is a "safe country",

calling the deal as "reckless and illegal"[67]. Human Rights Watch have documented a wide range of border violence on the EU-Turkish borders[68].

In a study conducted with migrant informal groups in Şanlıurfa, Turkish border town to Syria, Mencutek finds out that community-based initiatives, particularly those initiated by Syrians with socio-economic capital often informally, operate mainly within spaces invited by state agencies and international donors, contributing to the survival and coping mechanisms of refugees[69]. Refugee communities can establish their own organizations in Turkey under certain conditions (at least 7 founding members who have legal status), as the law treats some refugees as nationals. In this regard, the Refugees Association in Turkey, a national NGO that seeks solutions to the problems of displaced communities, provides legal assistance to refugee communities wishing to establish NGOs[70].

Hayata Destek (Supporttolife) is an influential national NGO in Turkey supporting refugees across Turkey as well as on border crossings to ensure refugees have access to basic rights and social services, including providing community-based protection though community centers.

A group of refugees in Tripoli, Lebanon, established their own initiative in 2015 called *SHiFT Social Innovation Hub*, initially in response to the lack of international organizations in the city. The organization started rehabilitating and restoring destroyed community centers in the city where impacted refugees, children and woman, could access to safe spaces[71]. Another example is *Makani*, a refugee-led organization established to assist refugee women to find "freedom and confidence through art and opportunities" in Lebanon, creating safe zones for women in overcoming traumas.

ACHRights (Wosol), a Syrian refugee-led association in Lebanon, focuses in monitoring the human rights situation of refugees, aiming to raise awareness and international advocacy to ensure the right to human dignity in countries of asylum[72].

In Lebanon, the legal conditions for refugees to establish NGOs are more difficult than in Turkey. Although the NGOs must be represented by Lebanese citizens before the law, some of refugee-led groups and initiatives are officially register their organizations to become approved NGOs in Lebanon[73]. *Basmeh and Zeitooneh*[74], *Sawa for Development*[75] *and Aid*, and *Multi Aid Programs (MAPS)*[76] are some of the refugee-led organizations established in Lebanon to protect and empower affected communities.

Given that non-Jordanians must obtain a special prime ministerial permit to establish a civil society organization[77], leading refugee groups to establish often individual and informal initiatives that could be targeted and criminalized under the pretext of security concerns. *Youth for Peace Imitative*[78], led by refugee youth, *Athar Platform*[79], built by a group of Syrian refugees, *Amqa*, a social organization named after Palestinian town, *the Committee of Palestinians displaced from Syria* are some of the informal refugee-led organizations committed to responding the needs of affected communities in Jordan.

Refugee communities in Jordan, predominantly Syrian and Palestinian refugees, have tended to cooperate with international NGOs for refugee response due to limited opportunities for advocacy through civil society activities.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Non-state actors and community-based organizations in the Middle East face significant challenges, including inadequate resources, security concerns, and political constraints. However, they also present opportunities for different approaches to migration management and support. By working closely with the communities they serve, they are able to gain a more nuanced understanding of the issues at stake and develop tailored responses to the cultural and social dynamics of the region.

Furthermore, more sustainable and inclusive solutions can be achieved by involving local actors in addressing migration and border issues. Their insights and expertise can be leveraged to have a greater impact on policy advocacy, service provision, and community resilience.

In conclusion, non-state actors and community-based organizations in the Middle East play a crucial role in addressing the complex migration dynamics and border issues in the region. Their efforts contribute to a multifaceted response to migration challenges, complementing and sometimes challenging state-led approaches. Understanding and supporting these actors can increase the effectiveness and sustainability of migration management and support strategies in the Middle East.

Concluding Remarks

The Middle East is experiencing complex migratory dynamics characterized by forced displacement, environmental degradation and changing demographics. The region holds the highest density of forcibly displaced individuals globally, with conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen driving unprecedented levels of migration. Environmental challenges, such as water scarcity, and climate-induced disasters, further exacerbate the conditions, leading to additional conflicts and thus internal displacements. The demographic landscape of refugees, particularly in neighboring countries like Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, presents a diverse picture, reflecting varying family structures and gender imbalances. These feature the complex relationship of geopolitical, environmental, and demographic factors in shaping migration trends in the Middle East.

Furthermore, the responses to these migration flows are multidimensional, involving a range of actors, such the EU and the UN, from international organizations to local communities. The shift from initial humanitarian-based approach and policy of openness to more preventive approaches by host countries indicates a multifaceted adaptive response to continued crises. The involvement of the European Union, particularly through agreements like the EU-Turkey deal, underscores the international dimension of the refugee crisis, with implications for border management and migration policies beyond the Middle East. Community-based organizations and non-state actors emerge as critical yet often underrecognized players in this landscape, offering grassroots support and advocacy in the face of limited formal recognition and challenging political environments. These conclusions underscore the need for comprehensive, multi-level policies that recognize the roles of various stakeholders in addressing the migration challenges in the Middle East.

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