

## REFUGEES AND THE MAKING OF AN ARAB REGIONAL DISORDER

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Wars in Iraq and Syria have displaced around 12 million Syrians and 4 million Iraqis as of June 2015, marking a historic turning point for the region. The increasingly sectarian nature of these conflicts is dismantling the idea of a nation-state built on societal diversity and is affecting the refugee policies of Lebanon and Jordan, the two Arab countries hosting the most refugees. A substantial new underclass of citizens has emerged, along with an evident expansion in militant identities. Without effective policies, these trends will have profound repercussions on regional and international stability.

### A Historic Turning Point

- Wars in Iraq and Syria are generating 90 percent of Arab refugee flows as of 2015. These displacements represent the catastrophic humanitarian implications of a profound political crisis.
- The fallout from the Syrian crisis mirrors the repercussions of Iraq's conflicts but on an amplified scale.
- Governments as well as rogue entities are targeting communities based on ethnic and sectarian identities. These identity politics are playing a significant role in determining patterns of displacement and the potential for return.
- Identity politics inform the refugee policies of Lebanon and Jordan. Fears of prospective changes to current social orders fuel national anxieties.
- The international response to these conflicts is inadequate, while the ongoing course of territorial fragmentation in Syria and Iraq and the absence of immediate political or military solutions are creating a protracted refugee crisis.

### Major Lessons for Future Policy

**Addressing the refugee crisis is a political and developmental imperative.** Finding adequate resolutions to the catastrophic fallout from the conflicts is primarily a political challenge, and political responses should steer clear from identity-based partition. But a developmental approach is also essential for political stabilization, societal reconciliation, and peace building.

**Actors should prepare for protracted displacement.** Lebanon and Jordan need to adjust their refugee policies accordingly. International and regional actors should step up to their responsibilities toward host countries and refugees.

**The internally displaced problem requires quick international action.** Assistance is needed in the form of either protection for those facing imminent threats to their lives or humanitarian and other support.

**An international partnership is needed.** The scale of the crisis and its wide reach means that responsibility for addressing the fallout must go beyond the United Nations and include partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations.

**Education is essential.** Inadequate funding for educating millions of children in the region must be rectified. Keeping these children in school gives them a foundation for a better future and makes them less vulnerable to recruitment by extremist organizations.

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