

## Over 600,000 displaced Syrians returned home so far this year – UN agency

11 August 2017 – More than 600,000 displaced Syrians returned home in the first seven months of 2017, the United Nations migration agency and partners have found.

Findings by the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) and partners [indicate](#) that 84 per cent of the people returning had been displaced within Syria, and the rest returned from Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Refugees returning from Turkey and Jordan reportedly returned mainly to Aleppo and Al Hasakeh Governorates.

An estimated 27 per cent of the returnees stated that they did so to protect their assets or properties and 25 per cent referred to the improved economic situation in their area of origin.

Other factors included the worsening economic situation in the place where they were seeking refuge, at 14 per cent; social or cultural issues such as tribal links, political affiliations or any obstacle preventing integration in their area of displacement, at 11 per cent; and the improvement of the security situation in their area of return, at 11 per cent.

Half of all returns in 2016 were to Aleppo Governorate. The report shows that similar trends have been observed in 2017. Consequently, an estimated 67 per cent of the returnees, or 405,420 individuals, returned to Aleppo Governorate, with 27,620 returning to Idleb Governorate, and 75,209 to Hama Governorate, 45,300 to Ar-Raqqa Governorate, 21,346 to Rural Damascus and 27,861 to other governorates.

Aleppo city received the most returnees.

Reports also find that 97 per cent returned to their own house, 1.8 per cent are living with hosts, 1.4 per cent in abandoned houses, 0.14 per cent in informal settlements and 0.03 per cent in rented accommodation.

About 83 per cent and 80 per cent of returnees said they have access to food and household items, respectively. But only 41 per cent have access to water and 39 per cent to health services – a dangerously low level – as the country's infrastructure has been extremely damaged by the conflict.

While trends of returns increase, Syria continues to witness high rates of displacement. From January to July 2017, an estimated 808,661 people were displaced, many for the second or third time, and over 6 million in total currently remain displaced within the country.

Returns have mainly been spontaneous but not necessarily voluntary, safe or sustainable. As such, they cannot, at present, be considered a durable

solution.

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## Smugglers throw hundreds of African migrants off boats headed to Yemen – UN

10 August 2017 – A total of 300 migrants have reportedly been forced from boats over the past two days by smugglers off the coast of Yemen &#8211 many feared dead or missing, the United Nations migration agency has reported.

&#8220The survivors told our colleagues on the beach that the smuggler [pushed them into the sea](#) when he saw some ‘authority types’ near the coast,&#8221 said Laurent de Boeck, the Yemen Chief of Mission of the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)).

&#8220They also told us that the smuggler has already returned to Somalia to continue his business and pick up more migrants to bring to Yemen on the same route. This is shocking and inhumane. The suffering of migrants on this migration route is enormous. Too many young people pay smugglers with the false hope of a better future,&#8221 Mr. de Boeck added.

According to IOM, up to 180 migrants were reportedly thrown into the sea from a boat today by the smugglers. Five bodies have been recovered so far, and around 50 are reported missing.

This latest incident comes barely 24 hours after smugglers forced more than 120 Somali and Ethiopian migrants into the sea as they approached the coast of Shabwa, a Yemeni Governorate along the Arabian Sea, resulting in the drowning of around 50 migrants. The migrants had been hoping to reach countries in the Gulf via war-torn Yemen.

Shortly after yesterday’s tragedy, IOM staff found the shallow graves of 29 migrants on a beach in Shabwa, during a routine patrol. The dead had been quickly buried by those who survived the smuggler’s deadly actions. The approximate average age of the passengers on the boat was 16.

**AUDIO:** IOM spokesperson Olivia Headon says that people traffickers often dupe their predominantly teenage victims into making the perilous sea crossing.  
Credit: UN News

“The Secretary-General is heart-broken by this continuing tragedy,” his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told reporters at the daily briefing in New York.

“This is why he continues to stress that the international community must

give priority to preventing and resolving a variety of situations which both generate mass movement and expose those already on the move to significant danger," he added, underscoring the need to increase legal pathways for regular migration and offer credible alternatives to these dangerous crossings for people in need of international protection.

Since January of this year, IOM estimates that around 55,000 migrants left the Horn of Africa to come to Yemen, most with the aim of trying to find better opportunities in the Gulf countries. More than 30,000 of those migrants are under the age of 18 from Somalia and Ethiopia, while a third are estimated to be female.

This journey is especially hazardous during the current windy season in the Indian Ocean. Smugglers are active in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, offering fake promises to vulnerable migrants. IOM and its partners operate across the region to support these migrants and provide lifesaving assistance to those who find themselves abused or stranded along the route.

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## Investing in women key to sustainable peace in DR Congo and Nigeria – UN deputy chief

10 August 2017 – Investing in women and girls must be central to global efforts towards sustainable peace and development in both Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations deputy chief said today.

"Both have dismayingly low levels of women's political participation and are experiencing conflicts marked by extremely high levels of sexual- and gender-based violence," said Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed as she updated the Security Council on [her recent trip](#) to the two African countries.

The trip, from 19 to 27 July, was "the first of its kind" because it focused entirely on the role of women in peace, security and development, she said.

The [joint AU-UN high-level mission](#) was undertaken by four African women, namely Ms. Mohammed, the UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, and the African Union (AU) Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop.

The mission's goal was to advance peace by advancing the equality, empowerment and well-being of women, which is in line with the Secretary-

General's vision and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In both countries, Ms. Mohammed noted, the mission met with Heads of State, ministers, donors, diplomats, faith leaders, parliamentarian and the respective UN mission and country teams, spending the lion's share of time with the women and girls most affected by conflicts, including through visits to camps for internally displaced persons.

The international community needs to better understand the role of women in development and peace building alongside the gender dimensions of conflict if our responses are to be effective UN deputy chief Amina Mohammed

While each country is unique, the situations share some commonalities, she said, noting that sexual violence is widespread in the DRC, and abductions, forced marriage and the use of women as suicide bombers have taken a terrible toll in northern Nigeria, where in the camps sexual exploitation, including in the form of 'sex for food' is a new and alarming trend.

'The international community needs to better understand the role of women in development and peace building alongside the gender dimensions of conflict if our responses are to be effective,' she said.

Turning to country-specific matters, the UN deputy chief said that the mission was touched by the meeting with the schoolgirls, who were abducted in Nigeria's Chibok and then released, after years in captivity, by the Boko Haram group.

'Their remarkable strength as survivors rather than victims is inspiring. Many are receiving education and psychosocial support to prepare them for reintegration,' Ms. Mohammed said, noting that thousands of other young women who have been subjected to sexual violence and affected by conflict in other ways are still to receive adequate support.



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed visited the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as part of her joint AU-UN high-level trip. During her visit to the Mugunga camp for internally displaced persons (IDP), she said that she is committed to ensuring that women can return in "dignity and humanity, which is not a favour but a right." UN Photo/Myriam Asman.



The Mugunga camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) is located in Goma, North Kivu Province, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed's visit to the camp was part of a four-day trip focused on the fight against sexual violence and the advancement of women. UN Photo/Myriam Asman



In Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed was received by President Joseph Kabila at the presidential pavilion of N'djili International Airport. Photo: UN Photo/John Bompengo



At the airport, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed was welcomed on arrival by Maman S. Sidikou, Head of the UN stabilization mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, known as MONUSCO. UN Photo/John Bompengo



The UN has a long standing presence in the Muganga camp. This photo is taken in 2007, as internally displaced persons (IDPs) line up for food distribution, supplied by WFP. UN Photo/Marie Frechon



Prior to Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), she spent several days in Nigeria. In this photo, she is pictured in Abuja with Nigerian women leaders, as well as women and girls affected by conflict in the north-eastern part of the country. On the same day, the UN deputy chief told reporters that action is needed now towards the meaningful participation of women in peace processes, as well ensuring their voices are heard in all aspects of society. UN Photo/Lulu Gao



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed participates in a meeting with women leaders, as well as conflict-affected women, in Nigeria. Photo: UN Photo/Lulu Gao

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### ***Beyond theoretical debate, humanitarian-development nexus requires tangible resources***

In the DRC, the mission emphasized the need to respect and implement the 31 December agreement, which provided a clear path towards democratic elections, she noted.

At the time of her visit, Ms. Mohammed said the electoral commission had registered more than 80 per cent of voters. That number now stands at more than 90 per cent. Of those registered, 48 per cent are women, placing the country in the same bracket as more established democracies such as Solomon Islands and Paraguay.

The mission also met with women who have no choice but to cook with coal in their tents, at great risk to their health and that of their children.

While we may debate the humanitarian-development nexus philosophically here in New York, without resources flowing to both sectors simultaneously

and a real investment in early recovery, we can neither sustain peace nor prevent future gender based violence,&#8221 she said, encouraging donors to respond to the DRC's reintegration challenges based on need alone.

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## [Iraq launches UN-supported action plan to save the lives of mothers and newborns](#)

10 August 2017 – Decades of conflict and under-investment have placed a huge strain on Iraq's healthcare system &#8211 with pregnant women and their babies paying for it with their lives, according to three United Nations agencies.

&#8220Although progress has been made to lower maternal mortality rates, there has been [slow headway](#) in reducing the mortality rates for children under five,&#8221 said the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) and UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)) in a joint statement.

&#8220Newborn babies are particularly vulnerable because of poor birth practices, inadequate referral mechanisms and inefficient neonatal care, particularly in remote areas,&#8221 they added.

With the support of UNICEF, the Ministry of Health launched the Every Newborn Action Plan ([ENAP](#)), which was developed jointly with UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA. The ENAP is an evidence based strategy to invest in, and improve the quality of maternal and newborn care.

According to the agencies, breastfeeding, neonatal resuscitation, kangaroo mother care for preterm babies, and the prevention and treatment of infections will help prevent these infant deaths.

&#8220Providing high quality care before and after birth not only saves lives, it is also an investment to ensure Iraqi children have the best start in life and meet their full potential,&#8221 said Peter Hawkins, UNICEF's Representative in Iraq.

&#8220WHO and other partners will work to support the Government of Iraq through the Ministry of Health to achieve equitable universal health coverage, including the provision of comprehensive services for every woman and newborn in Iraq in order to contribute to the substantial reduction of maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity,&#8221 added in Musani Altaf, WHO Representative in Iraq.

Ramanathan Balakrishnan, UNFPA's Representative in Iraq, added:

&#8220Neonatal mortality contributes significantly to child mortality in

Iraq. UNFPA is proud to have played a part in the formulation of the Newborn Action Plan and commits to support the Ministry of Health in its implementation.

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