

What shapes the Middle East's migration patterns

Thu, 2020-02-20 00:21

ABU DHABI: Less than two months since an unhappy year for the Arab region's migrants and refugees came to an end, the omens of things to come are far from good.

According to the latest "Situation Report on Migration in the Arab Region," prepared by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in collaboration with various UN agencies, displacement and migration are two prominent trends at the beginning of 2020. Particularly – and unsurprisingly – in countries with ongoing wars.

An overwhelming majority of Arab countries endorsed the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) at the UN General Assembly in December 2018, voting to adopt its principles in national legislatures.

Subsequently, the number of migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea was found to have plunged in 2018 to almost a tenth of what it was in 2015.

However, the reality of the region's migrant and refugee situation belies the hopes raised by the adoption of the GCM.

In Libya, for example, there was a steep deterioration last year in the living conditions of migrants and refugees stranded in the unstable North African country.

FASTFACTS

29m – An estimated 29 million people have migrated from Arab countries since 1990.

1/2 – Almost half of the people who migrated stayed within the Arab region.

9.1m – Refugees who have sought protection in the Arab region include 3.7 million under the mandate of the UN Refugee Agency and 5.4 million registered with UNRWA.

14.5% – The number of migrant workers in 18 Arab countries stood at 23.8 million in 2017, representing 14.5 percent of all migrant workers globally.

?The country's protracted civil conflict has not only caused massive displacement within its borders, but also means it has become a dangerous place for economic migrants from sub-Saharan Africa wishing to travel to Europe. World leaders have just pledged in Berlin not to interfere in Libya's

civil conflict and to uphold a UN arms embargo, but only time will tell if that promise will be honored.

In Syria, meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in Idlib – the last stronghold of opposition forces and a safe haven for millions of internally displaced persons (IDP) – remains shaky as Russian-backed regime forces press on, despite mounting civilian casualties.

In Yemen, a peace opportunity was missed in early 2019, and there has been no let-up since in the fighting between government forces and the Houthi militia, who control the capital Sanaa and the northern highlands. The country currently hosts between 2 million and 3.5 million IDPs and another 1.28 million returnees, in addition to 279,000 migrants and refugees – almost exclusively from Somalia and Ethiopia – for whom the country is a short-term way station, not a final destination.

Lebanon is in the grip of a wide-ranging crisis, too. People at the bottom of the economic ladder, including 1.5 million Syrian refugees and almost 500,000

Palestinian refugees, supplement their meager incomes with handouts from aid agencies. Even before the protests erupted in Lebanon in October last year, a UN vulnerability assessment report for refugees in the country, carried out in early 2019, made grim reading.

It said about 73 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon were living below the poverty line – up from 69 percent the year before, and considerably higher than the estimated 28 percent of Lebanese in the same situation.

Of course, migration and displacement have long shaped the Arab region, with countries simultaneously acting as points of origin, transit and destination.

However, in recent years, the distinction between voluntary and forced migration has become blurred as political crises and civil conflicts – viewed as the chief causes of human displacement – have proliferated. “The challenge today is to put in place policies that will ensure successful and true integration while benefiting both the countries of residence and origin,” Laura Petrache, a senior adviser at Migrant Integration Lab, told Arab News.

According to UN reports, the number of migrants and refugees originating from the Arab region reached 29 million in 2017. Almost half of them remained in the region. Overall, the number of migrants and refugees as a proportion of the total population of the Arab region has risen steadily over the past three decades.

In 2018, around 80 percent of the region’s refugees originated in the Levant, mostly on account of the Syrian conflict.



Caption

Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Sudan are among the top 10 Arab destinations for migrants and IDPs owing to conflicts in the neighborhood. Apart from Lebanon, all of those countries have witnessed an increase in the number of refugees and migrants within their borders since 2015.

After Turkey, Jordan was the second-most-popular destination country for refugees and migrants from the region, with Lebanon,

Saudi Arabia and the UAE also reporting significant numbers. Iraq was the only country that saw its national refugee and migrant population decrease.

What the latest reports confirm is that migration in the Arab world not only has multiple drivers – socio-economic pressures, political instability and environmental degradation – but also complex patterns and trends.

Take the Gulf and the Levant regions. They attract different kinds of migrants because their levels of stability, security and development are not comparable. While Libya, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen are plagued by conflict, violence, corruption and divisions in both society and polity, GCC member countries are leading the way in groundbreaking ideas and investments, building cities of the future and attracting talent from across the world.

The migrant population in the GCC countries swelled from 8.2 million in 1990 to 28.1 million in 2017 – a substantial rise compared with figures for other

parts of the Arab region.

Around 27 percent of global remittance outflows in 2017 reportedly came from the Arab region, estimated at \$120.6 billion, and almost all of that (98.9 percent or \$119.3 billion) came from GCC countries. According to the IOM's report, the top remittance-sending countries were the UAE (at \$44.3 billion) and Saudi Arabia (at \$36.1 billion).

Under the circumstances, it is difficult to see meaningful, positive change for migrants happening any time soon in the Arab region, with the possible exception of the GCC.

"Migration policy making should move away from assimilationist frameworks," Petrache, of the Migrant Integration Lab, told Arab News. "Instead, the policy emphasis should be on working with countries of origin to achieve sustainable integration – and re-integration in the case of return immigration.

"The policies should take into consideration the potential for win-win solutions using and developing the capability of the migrants to make a positive contribution to local host communities," Petrache said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Editor's Choice](#)

[Migration](#)

Middle East migration patterns defy generalization

[Syrian father and daughter laugh off the shelling](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-02-20 00:46

SARMADA, Syria: In Syria's Idlib, there's no escaping the war, so Abdullah Al-Mohammed says the only way he found to reassure his daughter Salwa was to turn the shelling into a game.

A video in which she laughs every time an explosion goes off was widely shared on social media in recent days as a heartening but grim reminder of Idlib residents' daily lives.

"Is it a plane or is it a mortar?" he asks, as a whizzing sound grows in the background.

"A mortar," the three-year-old answers. "When it comes, we will laugh."

In another video, Salwa is standing on her father's lap in their living room and her hearty laugh is set off by the sinister thunder of a bomb dropped by a warplane.

"Tell me Salwa, what did the plane do," the father asks his daughter.

"The plane came and I laughed a lot. The plane just makes us laugh, it tells us: Laugh at me, laugh at me," she says.

An AFP reporter met the 32-year-old father in Sarmada, a town in Syria's last rebel pocket, which Russian-backed regime forces are trying to crush.

He and his family fled from Saraqeb, another town in Idlib which has already been retaken by regime forces and has been partly levelled by air raids.

Now as the regime presses its northwards offensive and continues to push civilians ever closer to the Turkish border, the air strikes are back.

Mohammed explains that when Salwa was still 12 months old, she started crying when she heard fireworks in the neighborhood.

He had to explain that it was only the sound of children playing for the Muslim holiday of Eid Al-Fitr.

"After that, whatever was coming to us from the air, I would take out my phone and tell her: 'Come, let's laugh together, these are children playing for Eid," he says.

"I try not to show her that what is happening as a bad thing but rather show it as something funny," he explains.

"One day, she will know that this is a sound of death but by then, she will have understood who we are and what our story is," Mohammed says.

The north of the province of Idlib is a dead end for hundreds of thousands of civilians displaced from other former rebel bastions across Syria.

It has been described by aid groups as the world's largest de facto open-air displacement camp.

Hundreds of people, many of them children, have been killed in recent weeks as pro-regime bombardment spares nothing, from homes to hospitals.

According to the United Nations, 900,000 people have been forced to flee their homes and shelters since December alone.

Tens of thousands of them are left to sleep rough in the thick of winter, with temperatures dipping to minus 7 degrees Celsius (around 19 degrees Fahrenheit) in some areas last week.

More than half of the displaced are children and at least seven of them have

died from the cold and the bad living conditions.

For those who have a shelter, the trauma of the intensive shelling is an issue that overwhelmed health services and relief organizations can scarcely address.

After nearly nine years of a conflict that has killed more than 380,000 people, Salwa's father says he no longer has dreams or hope.

"We are tired of sending messages, we have no aspirations. We just want these children to have a decent life," he says.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

Syria's Aleppo airport resumes flights for 1st time in yearsTurkish, Iranian media outlets exchange blows on Syria

[Man dies live on air while complaining](#)

about Iraq's health service

Wed, 2020-02-19 23:20

RIYADH: An elderly Iraqi man died live on television as he complained about the country's health services.

The health ministry said Wednesday the man was on his way to Al-Yarmok Hospital after the authorities had removed him from his shop in Al-Dawrah region, causing him to fall ill.

On his way to the hospital, he saw the cameraman and went to complain about the poor treatment of the facility, but he suffered a heart attack and died immediately.

The incident took place last week.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Iraq](#)

[Health](#)

Bangladeshi Hajj pilgrim treated for heart attack at King Abdullah Medical

[Houthi militias bury dozens of fighters](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-02-19 03:49

AL-MUKALLA, YEMEN: Houthi media reported that the Iran-backed militia buried dozens of fighters, including a senior commander, who had been killed in combat against Yemeni government forces or by Saudi-led coalition airstrikes. Brig. Yahiya Abdul Jabbar Juhedan, commander of the Brigade 417 Border Guards, was buried in Houthi-held Sanaa. Houthi media described him as having had “unrivaled” military know how.

Yemeni Army commanders say at least 1,000 Houthi fighters have been killed or injured since early last month, when fighting flared in the country’s north in the wake of a Houthi missile and drone attack that killed more than 110 soldiers and civilians in the city of Marib.

Fighting has intensified over the last couple of days, mainly in the provinces of Jouf, Marib and Serwah.

The heaviest fighting was reported on Monday and Tuesday in the northern province of Jouf, where government forces ambushed Houthi fighters and pushed back their assaults in the districts of Masloub and Ghayl. Many Houthi fighters were killed, state TV reported.

IED kills family

An improvised explosive device (IED) planted by the Houthis struck a vehicle, killing a family of four and injuring a person in the western province of Hodeida, state media reported.

The family members were killed on Sunday when their car drove over the IED in the region of Moushaj.

FASTFACT

Fighting has intensified over the last couple of days, mainly in the provinces of Jouf, Marib and Serwah.

The Houthis have planted thousands of landmines in Hodeida to obstruct a major push by government forces to liberate the province.

Local rights groups that document war casualties say Houthi landmines and IEDs have killed dozens of civilians so far this year.

The spiraling number of civilian deaths has prompted Yemeni officials to urge the UN to pressure the Houthis to stop planting landmines and to hand over maps showing where they are planted in liberated areas.

Brig. Gen. Tareq Mohammed Saleh told a UN official that the Houthis have planted thousands of landmines that kill civilians every day. Saleh urged the UN to help local demining efforts.

Masam, the Saudi project for landmine clearance, on Tuesday announced the detonation of more than 1,000 landmines, rockets and IEDs in the Mocha district of Taiz province.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Yemen](#)

[Houthis](#)

Saudi Arabia reaffirms full support for Yemeni people
US threatens to suspend Yemen aid operations over Houthi interference

[UN demands humanitarian corridors for Syria refugees](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-02-19 01:04

BEIRUT, ANKARA: Syrian regime troops on Tuesday pressed an offensive on the country's last major opposition enclave where the mass displacement of civilians is sparking fears of a humanitarian catastrophe.

Around 900,000 people have been forced from their homes and shelters in less than three months, leaving huge numbers to sleep rough in the thick of winter.

The UN said that half a million among them were children, some of whom have died of exposure in snow-covered camps.

“Over the past four days alone, some 43,000 newly displaced people have fled western Aleppo where fighting has been particularly fierce,” UN spokesman David Swanson said.

Since the start of February, the displacement figure was a staggering 300,000, he said.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called for the creation of humanitarian corridors, expressing horror at the regime offensive.

“No shelter is now safe. And as the government offensive continues and people are forced into smaller and smaller pockets, I fear even more people will be killed,” Michelle Bachelet said.

Bachelet was “horrified” by the unfolding humanitarian crisis, a statement said. “How can anyone justify carrying out such indiscriminate and inhumane attacks?” Bachelet said.

Tuesday’s violence left at least two civilians dead. A member of regime-backer Iran’s Revolutionary Guards was killed in Aleppo province in a rocket strike.

According to Save The Children, seven children – including a baby only seven months old – have died from freezing temperatures and bad living conditions in the camps.

“We’re worried that the death toll will increase given the absolutely inhumane living conditions that women and children are finding themselves in,” the charity’s Syria director Sonia Khush said.

Meanwhile, Turkey will deploy more troops to Idlib and retaliate against attacks by regime forces there, even as Ankara continues to discuss the situation with Moscow, Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

Turkey tells Russia: Syria regime attacks on Idlib must stop
Car bomb kills two in Turkish-controlled Syrian town