

Foreword: Syria in 2018 – in search of solutions

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This important issue of *Forced Migration Review* draws our attention to the current challenges facing displaced Syrians and the continuing search for solutions. The statistics of Syrian displacement are staggering – and the numbers continue to rise. Half of Syria's population has been displaced: five and a half million are registered refugees and over six million are internally displaced.

The tragedy of Syria's conflict and the levels of displacement of its people reflect specific stresses and shortcomings in our region that often mirror similar global patterns. These stresses and shortcomings include the legacies of erratic modern political and economic governance that we cannot change but they are mostly triggered by issues that are fully within our control: inadequate and wavering political will; poor or absent host state responses to accommodating refugees in the short term; insufficient and uncoordinated humanitarian and development aid; continued internal stresses and violence that perpetuate displacement; and direct participation in warfare inside Syria by half a dozen foreign countries from within and beyond our region.

Many countries and organisations have offered assistance, yet we are also witnessing the world's weariness and its inability to devise a coherent, effective response that could end the suffering of these millions of displaced people. Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey host the majority of Syrian refugees. They have opened their borders, schools and clinics, with the help of substantial international humanitarian assistance. Many communities and individuals have welcomed and helped the newcomers. However, the arrival of refugees in low-income and vulnerable communities also exacerbates existing problems and creates new tensions, notably regarding jobs, wages and overburdened infrastructure. Sadly, some host countries eventually reach a breaking point, and close their doors to new refugees. Donor and compassion fatigue lead to more

restrictive reception and hosting policies within and beyond the Middle East, as fear, anger and even desperation assert themselves.

The traumas that displaced people experience are caused by the same underlying and persistent deficiencies, disparities and dysfunctions that create large-scale human marginalisation and vulnerabilities in some societies. If the underlying drivers of human indignity are not addressed, displacement will continue, with all the accompanying challenges.

Such lessons – including the reality that many displaced people will never return home – have long been debated. Researchers, humanitarian agencies, local non-governmental organisations and host governments should now pursue a vital yet elusive strategy; it must merge temporary asylum and emergency humanitarian aid mechanisms with the longer-term promises of development and dignity that emanate from access to work and residency opportunities. Doing so will lift up both displaced people and host communities.

Refugees need protection and hosting until a durable solution is possible – which for those who choose to return must be under safe, voluntary and dignified conditions. We must generate the political will and international mobilisation that are needed in order to assist displaced people and host communities alike, and must also better resource the work of local humanitarian organisations helping displaced Syrians. Recent initiatives such as the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees offer the possibility of progress but can only succeed with significant support and commitments by governments. We must support displaced people to regain the chance to live fulfilling, dignified lives – to return home in peace, or to build a new life elsewhere that allows them and their neighbours to flourish together.

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