The Impact of Forced Migration in the Middle East: Syrian and Palestinian Refugees

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Abstract

Forced migration in the Middle East dates back to the mid-20th century. This paper takes up the experiences of Palestinian and Syrian refugees and examines the impact of forced migration on the host countries and the region at large. It explicates the short and long-term economic, cultural and political outcomes of these two refugee flows and concludes that forced migration- although extremely disruptive to all involved initially- has a net benefit on the host countries in the long-run. It also explores the reasons behind the lack of regional coping mechanisms, including regional migration management mechanisms, and proposes that the terms such as "crisis" and "guests" should be avoided when discussing protracted situations because refugees are not able to repatriate to their countries of origin whenever they wish, and may instead become permanent residents of the host country because of the political and economic problems in the home countries.

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Key Words

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Introduction

For decades, the Middle East has been the scene of forced migrations. As Martin indicates, forced migration itself has many causes and takes on many forms.[1] People leave their homes because of civil wars, political turmoil, and international terrorism, among other things. Forced migration may also take place because of the creation of nation-states. The phenomenon of violent mass displacement has become one of the defining features of the Middle East. Forced migration continued throughout the 20th century, with the displacement of the Palestinians following the wars with Israel in the 1940s and in the 1960s, creating a refugee population that still has not been officially settled decades later, and forcing the populations into generations of "permanent impermanence".[2] Forced migration has continued well into the 21st century, as

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Syria's civil war has created the largest number of refugees since World War II, with over 5 million forced to flee the country and at least 7 million internally displaced.[3] This paper will take up the experiences of the Palestinians and Syrians and examine the impact of their forced migration on the region and beyond.

The phenomenon of violent mass displacement has become one of the defining features of the Middle East.

Of all the different categories of people, from citizens to foreigners, forced migration has had the greatest impact on how the term "refugee" is considered. Historically, refugees are considered as temporary. Refugees would flee an internal conflict, or would be forcibly removed from the country of origin, but it was expected that they would return home as soon as problems disappear. The history of forced migration has had a big impact on the entire Middle East, on its cultures, and especially on the politics of the region. Each time there is mass scale forced migration, it changes the relationships among the countries, and has a deep impact on the individual countries involved. As a consequence, labour markets are affected not only in the home country of the refugees but also in the host country. Typically, host countries also benefit as they receive a large influx of new labour force. Perhaps surprisingly, such influxes also improve the institutional and political environment of the host country, as existing institutions and the political system are forced to cope with the influx of refugees. It can take some time for any host country to adjust initially, but in the long run, if managed well, they may reap the benefits of refugee influx. Additionally, the host country's culture is enriched by the increase in diversity that the displaced people bring with them through their own cultures. Furthermore, cross-cultural political relationships are strengthened in the long run as the countries have to learn to work together to handle the major displacement of people.

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Naturally, these benefits do not come without a price. The migrants themselves suffer some of the worst trauma that people can ever experience. All the countries involved are greatly disrupted politically and socially, and in cases similar to Syria, the whole region can

become unstable. Culturally, the host country will be disrupted as mentioned above, and although increased diversity will make the home country stronger in the long run, not everyone will be happy to see this change, as the country's identity will be in flux. This is especially true as handling the influx of refugees can force countries to question their identity of being traditionally open to all newcomers, as is happening in the European Union countries.[4] Although forced migration may pave the way for strengthening institutions in countries of destination, it should be noted that it is not the will of the people to flee their home countries since they are forced out of their country often by desperate circumstances. Therefore, forced migration has both positive and negative impacts on the host society. Regardless of the impacts, the problem of forced migration needs to be addressed adequately, since the initial costs of managing an increasing number of refugees are much bigger than the eventual benefits accrued.

Labour Markets

It is impossible to have large numbers of people move from one country to various other countries without the labour markets being profoundly affected. As expected, the home country loses out since thousands of workers are forced to flee the country. For the host country, the picture can be more nuanced, and the benefits remain more uncertain, as huge number of workers suddenly flood into their domestic labour market. Such a sudden influx is initially disruptive if not managed properly as these new workers are not instantly absorbed into the new society, and this creates a burden on the existing institutions. This, in turn, can lead host countries to question the wisdom of opening their borders to the refugees. However, the net effect is beneficial to the host countries as the new labour pool ultimately makes the economy stronger.

A prime example of this is what has happened in Turkey following the influx of close to 3.5 million refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict. Although Turkey has spent billions of euros to accommodate them; economically, this inflow of refugees into Turkey has had a net benefit. While the refugees have displaced Turkish workers in some areas, notably in the unskilled, informal, and part-time work sectors, they have also been the catalyst for an increase in formal employment for the Turks, an increase in demand for higher-quality work, which is then filled by the Turkish workers, and an increase in the average wages of the Turkish employees employed in the formal sector. Although the net benefit is overall positive for Turkey, labour market dynamics have shifted. Women in particular have been

negatively impacted by the influx of refugees, as they have been forced out of the informal labour market, and have not seen a corresponding uptick in employment in the formal sector.[5] The Syrian crisis has also created a similar economic distress in Jordan and Lebanon. Jordan and Lebanon have registered a decline in economic growth, increased social tension, insecurity and political instability.[6] From 2011 to 2014, Lebanon registered a growth rate of 1.8%, declining from 9.2% in 2007 to 2010, while Jordan experienced a growth rate of 2.8% in 2011-2014, a decline of 3.0% from its economic growth between 2009 and 2010.[7] One of the main challenges facing Lebanon and Jordan is balancing quality and quantity of employment for its own nationals and Syrian refugees. To safeguard job opportunities for its citizens, Lebanon has implemented procedural legislation that places its nationals in formal jobs, resulting in many Syrians finding jobs in the informal sector. In Turkey, the entry of Syrian nationals into the informal labour market has resulted in a decrease of informal work among the Turkish labour force from 50 % to approximately 30 %.[8]

The Turkish experience highlights the fact that for the host countries to experience the full benefit of a refugee influx, the refugees need to be quickly integrated into the labour market on a formal level, as this will have the effect of giving the refugees the protection of a stable situation.[9] If this does not happen, the refugees will end up in the informal market, which, although it provides some form of employment, is ultimately less beneficial to both the refugees and the economy of the host country. In such circumstances, the refugees have an insecure form of employment, and the host country does not have access to tax revenue that would otherwise be generated by the work of the refugees.

Politics

Political disruption is inevitable when it comes to forced migration. Political upheaval often leads to and results from forced migration. A prime example of this is the political upheaval that led to the forced migration of thousands of Palestinian refugees following the war with Israel in 1948, and the subsequent creation of the state of Israel, which resulted in regional political turmoil in and of itself, and finally, the 1967 war. Many of these refugees are still living in camps or ethnic neighbourhoods where human security continues to be a major problem. One other factor that makes these refugees particularly unique in Lebanon is that most of them are descendants of the original refugees who fled decades before and have not been granted citizenship. As indicated

by Goldberg, the exact number of those stateless today is uncertain, but it is probably a few tens of thousands.[10] As the question of their ultimate fate is still undecided, they exist in a state of "permanent impermanence," as mentioned earlier.[11]

The question of what to do with the Palestinian refugees is one of the main sticking points in the ongoing political dispute between Israel and the Palestinians. Palestinian authorities assert the right of return, saying that the Palestinian refugees should be allowed to return to Israel. Israeli authorities see this as a non-starter, as it would dramatically change the demographics of the country, making the Jewish population a minority. Of course, there is more than one factor that keeps the political dispute between Israel and the Palestinians alive, but the fact that the Palestinian and Israeli authorities have opposing, non-negotiable positions means that it can be argued that the presence of the refugees is doing its part to keep the political situation from being completely settled.[12]

Although the short-term burden on a host country of a new refugee population can be great, the net effect in the long-term is positive. In the short-term, an influx of refugees creates pressure on the host government's resources, services, and labour markets,[13] and a decline in economic growth due to disruptions in regional trade, diminishing receipts from tourism, worsening confidence of potential investors, and diminishing capital inflows in the region.[14] However, it is not all negative and in some regards, forced migration can have a positive effect on the economic and political fronts. Despite the negative shock in the short-term due to the influx of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, the high number of refugees may bring about a positive impact on these countries' economy. For example, refugees are additional consumers, boosting demand for necessities in these countries. Therefore, if the host countries can trigger an effective response to refugee influx, for example, supplying the basic needs (i.e. food and shelter) and related services (i.e. transportation, health and education), they could experience a positive economic growth in the long run.[15] If over time, the refugees are properly integrated into the host countries' economies, their contribution will be amplified as they are rendered less dependent on social transfers and thus, become more stable.

The forced migration from Syria has had perhaps the greatest political impact of any forced migration in recent history. Neighbouring countries have accepted many of the millions of displaced, but as the conflict keeps going, countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey are feeling the

strain. This is particularly true for the host countries that are underdeveloped economically in comparison to other countries in the region. Jordan and Lebanon, in particular, have both expressed concern over the burden being placed on their institutions, with Jordanian officials recently stating that, without additional international aid, they will soon be at the breaking point. Turkey has also received only a limited amount of international aid so far, as promised by the EU under the 1:1 refugee deal.

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To solve this limited burden-sharing problem, Jordan says that it needs more international aid and this highlights, perhaps non-intuitively, the positive political impact that forced migration can have. Forced migration forces a change in the politics of the host country, as the institutions are forced to adapt to the added strain on them, and the refugee policy is forced to adapt as well. At the regional level, host countries are compelled to reach out to their neighbours and work to share the (hopefully) short-term burden of hosting the refugees. For example, Syria and Lebanon signed a bilateral agreement before the Syrian conflict for economic and social cooperation, where citizens of both countries were granted the freedom to stay, work and carry out economic activities. However, the Lebanese authorities suspended the right of Syrian refugees to work in the country as of early 2015 due to mounting social unrest and problems with the public service provision. To properly share the burden of forced migration, especially on the scale created by the Syrian conflict, close cooperation is required. Not all the countries in the region are at the same economic level, and thus have different capabilities for hosting refugees. To equitably share the burden, other countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) would need to step in. In addition, the countries in the region need to talk and cooperate with each other, and this can lead to ties being forged and strengthened eventually. These ties then can be used in the future to further international cooperation on other regional challenges that may arise.

In the long-term, new ties can be forged between the home country of the forcibly migrated, and the host countries. This can come about as the host countries and the home country work together to settle the conflict that

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has resulted in the forced migration, also from the shift in demographics. The conflict in Syria has effectively spread out the Syrian population in the region and beyond. The vast majority of Syrians now live outside Syria, especially in neighbouring countries. Although their ties to their homeland are strained at best, they still exist. In the future, these personal ties will continue to remain, and will create points of commonality between the host countries, and the home countries. For example, when conflict in Syria is eventually settled, Syria, and the countries hosting Syrian refugees, will have to work together to ensure that the ties between them remain strong so that the Syrians abroad can either return to Syria, or at least have easier travel to and from Syria to visit family, and to deal with other personal interests in Syria. In brief, although greatly disruptive in the short-term, forced migration can lead to an improved political situation as existing systems are forced to adapt to the new reality, and to forge new and strengthen existing political ties among countries, as Lebanon and Jordan attempted to do with Syria through labour agreements in 1993 and 2001 respectively.[16]

Culture

Culturally speaking, forced migration changes everything, especially when it is a large-scale forced displacement. In the Middle East, the countries, except for Israel, have a lot in common culturally, sharing common languages, cultures of hospitality, and a common religion, Islam, despite the sectarian differences. Thus, when Syrian Sunni refugees living along the border, for example, flee to Jordan, it does not create additional cultural problems thanks to common heritage and already existing ethnic ties.

In the long run, cultural diversity makes a country stronger. Although forced migration creates more challenges to nation-states due to its magnitude and spontaneity than regularly managed flows of migration, there is no reason that in the long run, this challenge should not be offset by the benefits that come from increased diversity. Diversity makes a country less insular and more outward focused. It also fosters a culture that is more welcoming of differences; this means that more people from more diverse backgrounds may feel accepted in the country. This will, in turn,

boost the reputation of the country abroad and increase its standing in the international community.

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However, while mixing cultures is good for a country in the long run, in the short run it can prove to be fractious. In Turkey, for example, where the home culture and the migrant cultures are more different than in other parts of the Middle East, the reception has been different as the cultural differences are more profound. Syria and Turkey, although sharing some religious similarities, linguistically and demographically have significant differences. As the social and political pressures have increased due to the continuous flow of refugees, anti-immigrant and anti-Arab sentiments have surfaced more and more within Turkish society.[17] This growing hostility creates a level of social/cultural tension within Turkish society. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the refugees are viewed as guests within the country. It means that they are expected to stay only temporarily and are viewed as outsiders. More recently, hostility targeting the Syrian population is on the rise in Turkey.[18]

Of course, it is assumed that some of the Syrian forced migrants will be integrated into the host country, but the assumption is that the majority of them should return to their home country, ideally through mechanisms created by the closer political ties between the home country and the host country. However, this puts the refugees in a position of being complete outsiders. Just as a personal guest is not viewed as being part of the household they are visiting, the forcibly migrated are not viewed as being full-fledged members of the society of the host country.

However, this does not mean that they do not have a cultural impact on their host countries. They bring with them the culture of their home countries, and they add to the diversity of their host country. Normally the migrants reject the culture of the host country, but their children, if they end up settling in the host country, adopt the culture of the new country. Although this can lead to intra-familial conflict, it does indicate that some cultural mixing is going on. If the families end up migrating back to their home country, they often find that both themselves and their home countries have changed, further adding to the cultural mixing.[19]

At the same time, the processes of cultural adaptation are costly for the receiving end countries both socially and economically. Cultural adaptation

poses a challenge for the native residents of the countries hosting refugees by calling into question issues of cultural identity, and creates tension among populations. Although a big portion of forced migration is taking place in the Middle East, the biggest cultural impact has been felt outside of the region. Millions of refugees have fled the Middle East entirely, migrating to Europe. Traditionally, Europe and the European Union have been open to migrants coming from particular regions. However, as the number of Syrian refugees in the EU has increased, so has opposition to their presence. Several countries in the European Union have taken the dramatic step of closing their borders to refugees, even questioning the Schengen regime by re-imposing strict border controls. Traditionally tolerant countries, like Sweden, have also seen populist social movements arise that oppose the presence of the migrants. Magnusson reported this story as one of shifting attitudes:

> It is the latest sign of the major change in sentiment sweeping across Scandinavia's biggest economy as the Sweden Democrats- a party with neo-Nazi roots- forces itself into the mainstream of Swedish politics…. forcing it [the government] to form a pact with the core opposition parties in an effort to prevent the Sweden Democrats from disrupting lawmaking. However, voters are signaling they want the group to have a bigger say. Moreover, after Sweden's generous asylum policies led to a surge in refugee flows from war zones in the Middle East, the government's political power has waned. Its budget pact with the opposition fell apart in October and both the coalition and the main opposition parties have since been forced to tighten their stance on immigration.[20]

Unlike in the Middle East, European cultures, broadly speaking, are historically quite different from Middle Eastern cultures and significant proportions of the population in Europe fear the transformative influence that a large number of Muslim migrants will have on Europe. This in turn has led to a serious discussion about what it means to be European, and whether or not European policy towards the Middle East needs to be reformulated.[21]

Security

Adding to the complexity of the situation are the fears regarding security. With all those people displaced, moving from one country to the next, forced migration raises

genuine and serious concerns regarding the security of the host countries. The fear is that, under the guise of being refugees, terrorist organizations and/or criminals will infiltrate the host countries and do harm against them. To have a balance between maintaining an open door to refugees and providing for the security of its people is one of the major challenges for nation-states. Bertossi and Milkop summarize it as follows:

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> One country declares a state of emergency because of the presence of undocumented immigrants in its territorial waters. Another dispatches asylum seekers to offshore islands in foreign jurisdictions before considering their applications. Genetic testing is seen as a proper tool for coping with possible abuses of family reunification laws. To paraphrase Shakespeare, there are serious problems in the "kingdom" of international migration and migration policies.[22]

Additionally, the host countries only need to look at another country in the Middle East that is experiencing conflict and a large outflow of refugees, Iraq, to see how it could turn ugly. As Lischer puts it when discussing the Iraqi refugee challenge:

> As this crisis demonstrates, displacement can expand and intensify violence during a civil war. In addition, refugee flows increase the risk that conflict will spread across international borders. In some cases, refugee militarization can lead to international war and regional destabilization. Even if the displaced Iraqis do not join militant groups, their mere presence will exacerbate political tensions. [23]

Many countries in the region, and beyond, are worried about the forced migrants coming into their territories. Existential questions about national identity aside, neighbouring host countries face the prospect that by opening their borders to refugees, they are opening their borders to the ongoing conflict. However, in the same article Lischer proposes a multi-faceted solution that can reduce the chances of this happening, and that can be applied to the Syrian refugee challenge:

First, provide a massive infusion of humanitarian aid. Second, resist the temptation to build camps to house the displaced. Third, do not return the displaced people home against their will. Fourth, expand and expedite the resettlement process.[24]

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This latter recommendation is not very feasible at the moment, but it points to the ideal solution to the whole challenge. The outcome that would assuage the concerns of everyone, forced migrants, regional leaders, as well as the average citizens, who are anxious about what the changing demographics of their neighborhoods mean for the identity of their countries, would be peaceful and voluntary repatriation of the refugees. It would not change demographics in Europe, but it would at least put an end to the misperception of a "refugee invasion" of Europe.[25] Politically speaking, this is much more achievable vis-à-vis the Syrian forced migrants, than for the Palestinians, whose lands were confiscated and for whom return to the homeland has become more difficult. Once the Syrian conflict is over and stability is achieved, there will be no major barrier towards eventual peaceful repatriation. Naturally, this assumes that the sectarian aspects of the Syrian civil war are adequately addressed in any peace treaties, and that there are minimal disputes at the communal level. A peace accord was established in the Balkans even after the tragic Srebrenica genocide, so one can hope that it could happen in Syria as well.

Regional Migration Management Mechanisms

Other than Turkey, the countries in the Middle East are not signatories of the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees. Turkey is also still keeping the geographical limitation clause, which theoretically hinders those coming from outside Europe to settle in Turkey as accepted refugees. Yet, with a temporary protection regime introduced in 2014, Turkey also provides shelter and protection while following *non-refoulement* for more than 3.5 million forced migrants coming from diverse nationalities, such as Syrians, Afghans, Iranians, Iraqis and Somalis. The Middle East also shares a culture of hospitality, whereby the forcibly displaced are welcome to seek shelter and aid. However, this

means that in the absence of formal mechanisms to provide support, most policies are *ad-hoc* and can be subject to change.

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Despite the absence of an international legal framework, UN agencies operate in the region. The most well-known of these is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, known by its acronym UNRWA. This agency's primary task is to provide institutional level support to Palestinian refugees in the camps. Of course, it cannot do everything and thus the refugees are forced to improvise. One of these most dangerous forms of improvisation that they have embarked on is being smuggled out of the Middle East. As Anderson highlights:

> "Before the Syrian civil war began, there were 70,000 Palestinians living in Ain al-Hilweh, which occupies less than one square mile of land. But the devastating conflict has prompted another flood of Syrians and Palestinians living in Syria: The camp's population is now estimated to have ballooned by another 10,000 people. Given the brutal conditions there, many of its residents are seizing the opportunity to hire people like Zeinab to provide them with passage to Europe. As the influx of refugees seeking asylum in Europe grows, so does the refugee smuggling industry, now said to be a $26 billion per year business. Over 300,000 migrants are reported to have crossed the Mediterranean Sea into Europe, and the number keeps growing".[26]

No doubt that human smuggling is extremely dangerous. Migrants face death along the route, and a very uncertain future in Europe. Often smugglers have simply had their money taken, and then they leave them behind before reaching destination points. Even if they do, they usually await deportation as Palestinians, since many of the destination countries would not take them in. Economically speaking, the Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East are very underdeveloped.[27] Poverty is one of the most enduring characteristics of these camps and it is one of the strongest motivators for the refugees to take extreme measures to improve their lot in life. Additionally, not only are the living conditions harsh in the Palestinian refugee camps; with

the civil war in nearby Syria, the camps have become a refuge of sorts for Syrian refugees in Lebanon as well. This, in turn, has attracted the attention of the Islamic State and others, effectively bringing the Syrian civil war to the Palestinians.

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Regardless of the human tragedies and death toll along the way, many forced migrants have chosen human smuggling, but they have also adopted other means as a survival strategy. One of these methods is taking advantage of religious social networks through conversions.[28] This strategy is neatly illustrated by the experience of the Syrian Christians. Christians, in general, in the Middle East have been hit particularly hard by forced migration. Religious leaders are abducted, sometimes murdered, and across the Middle East, thousands of Christians are fleeing their homes. Syrian Christians are among the tens of thousands of forced migrants escaping the civil war in Syria. In rebel held areas of Syria, no outward show of Christianity is tolerated. Other refugees have described being forced to pay a heavy tax and/or property. If they resist, they face the prospect of being killed. As Flamini reports:

> "The reality is that the Christian population in the Middle East is shrinking at a faster rate than ever before, through emigration and wholesale killing, as well as a lower birthrate than its Muslim counterpart… Migrants can come back, of course, but rarely do. Sixty-three percent of Arab Americans are descendants of Christian immigrants."[29]

In order to escape their dire situations and find a safe refuge, they follow the footsteps of Iranian Christians. That is to say that they usually establish connections with their Christian social networks to escape further to the West.[30]

The fact that no formal migrant management mechanisms have developed in the Middle East is a serious problem for the whole region. As the Syrian forced migrant experience demonstrates, having a culture of hospitality is not enough. Nearby countries will take the brunt of the influx of migrants, and if they are fortunate, like Turkey, they will be economically healthy enough to

be able to handle it. If they are not as robust, like Jordan or Lebanon, they will soon reach the breaking point, and if they do break, it will only add to the already existing instability. This lack of such mechanisms has compelled many of the forcibly displaced to risk abuse and even death to try to reach Europe through human smugglers[31] instead of being able to take advantage of a regional mechanism for safer transport away from the violence. Instead, the forced migrants are left to fend for themselves, and do the best they can to reach safety.

This also demonstrates a failure on the part of the host countries to recognize the value of the migrants. As illustrated in previous sections, the refugees can result in a net benefit to their host countries. Farsighted regional leaders would have looked at history, seen the patterns, and have instituted mechanisms to allow receiving countries to quickly integrate the refugees into the host society. Additional burden-sharing would have allowed host countries to quickly call upon the resources of other regional countries, so that no one country gets overwhelmed. One can hope that the Syrian refugee experience will demonstrate the need for such mechanisms and when the next mass forced migration happens, the region will be better prepared.

Conclusion

While depicted as refugee crisis in the media, the protracted case of both Palestinians and Syrians indicate that it is high time to come up with regional policies that target better management of such forced migration flows. I would argue that "crisis" is the wrong word to denote what is going on when forced migration occurs, though it is understandable why the term is being used as it contains a sense of urgency and call to action.

However, what is needed is to be better prepared in order to handle such issues more effectively and to think of long-term solutions. As Adamson underlines, this could be one of the reasons that regional coping mechanisms were never set up, even though forced migration in the Middle East has been occurring since the early 20th century.[32] The Palestinian refugees have been in a perpetual state of deep distress and misery for the last 60 years. The Syrian conflict has been going on since 2011 with no clear end in sight, and with more and more players getting embroiled in it. Understanding forced migration, as a calamity rather than crisis would mentally prepare policy makers by giving them a sense of the enormity of the challenge. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "calamity" as "a state of deep distress or misery caused by major misfortune or loss; an event that

causes great harm and suffering." Use of such a descriptive would make the international community consider the fact that it is not a short-term disaster but a long-term phenomenon that will require long-term solutions and long-term planning; not only to ameliorate the current crisis, but also to prepare for the possibility of more forced migrations in the future.[33]

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Additionally, the host countries need to revise the way that they think of the refugees themselves. Instead of thinking along the lines of these people being in their country as transient "guests" and providing the refugees assistance that is designed to provide aid only in the short-term, it would be better to begin to think of them as incentives, and try to fit them, skilled and unskilled alike, into the labor markets, with the recognition of diplomas. One can hope that this shift in thinking will force the regional policy makers to consider the long-term benefits to the host countries having migrants.

Of course, a sudden uncontrolled increase in the number of refugees might be devastating to any host country. Although the greatest cost is born by the forced migrants themselves as they go through deep trauma without a clear idea of when it will end, the host countries in the region face social unease created by the influx of migrants and by limited resources. Politically, it may result in unwanted ethnic tensions as a result of demographic imbalance. Furthermore, by opening their borders, host countries run the risk of inadvertently spreading the conflict if the refugees become militarized or the combatants follow them to the host country.

Nevertheless, forced migration can be turned into a net benefit in the long run for all the stakeholders: host society, home country, and refugees themselves. Economically, it makes the host country more prosperous, culturally, it is enriching, and politically, it makes the system more robust and the institutions more flexible. Internationally, countries in the region are forced to cooperate to not only share the initial burden of created by the forced migration, but to address the underlying factors that created it in the first place. This has the effect of strengthening existing ties while creating new ones. Traditionally, cultural hospitality and religious solidarity have been the mechanism by which the refugees have been aided,

and this has led to an absence of rights-based regional coping mechanisms. The fact that the Palestinian refugee population has been living for several generations with no solutions at sight and the tragedies lived out on a daily basis by the Syrian refugees mainly dispersed in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan are indications that the whole region needs to rethink how it addresses forced migration.

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Future Study

More research needs to be done on the social attitudes that host countries have towards refugees. How do the citizens of the countries in the region view refugees? Are they considered outsiders despite the fact that they have ethnic ties, share a common culture and speak the same language? What are the attitudes in countries like Jordan and Lebanon, where Palestinian refugees have been there for generations? Do local societies view them as a part of the national fabric? How extensive is the viewpoint that forced migrants in the Middle East are temporary guests? What is the effect of a lack of international protection mechanisms and agreements on the reception of refugees? Additional studies need to be done to see whether proper asylum policies and regional cooperation addressing the issue would redefine how refugees are viewed and treated. Lastly, more quantitative research needs to be carried out to measure how long it will take for host countries to finally reap the benefits of hosting forced migrants.

Endnotes

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