

This summary of inter and intra-regional displacement and displacement-induced mobility is produced by DRC Middle East and North Africa regional office drawing widely on available sources. It covers events, trends and data for the Middle East region (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq).

*A note on terminology: Throughout this report the term migrant/refugee is used for all persons involved in mixed migration flows (including asylum seekers, trafficked persons, migrants, refugees) with the exception of Syrians who are recognised as persons in need of international protection. If the group mentioned refers only to refugees or asylum seekers or trafficked persons or migrants it will be clearly stated.*

### SYRIA

**Forced Displacement:** As Syrian conflict enters its 6<sup>th</sup> year, ongoing fighting in the country continues to displace Syrians both within and outside of Syria. As at February 29, 2016 UNHCR had registered [4,786,920](#) Syrian refugees globally, marking an increase of 189,956 individuals (4.1%) from 4,596,964 on January 31, 2016. Of this number 4,298,382 Syrians live in urban, peri-urban, or rural areas, while only 488,538 live in formal camps.

New and intensified fighting in various governorates in Syria has increased displacement within Syria while pushing some thousands of Syrians to the Turkish and Jordanian borders. [Russian airstrikes](#) and increased fighting in [Aleppo](#) and Idlib governorates have newly displaced [75,775](#) people in Northern Syria since the beginning of February with thousands more internally displaced in Al-Hasakah governorate since mid-February. In Southern Syria ongoing fighting from November 2015 has displaced 86,670 Syrians in Dar'a and Quneitra governorates as at February 29, 2016. Thousands of displaced Syrians have fled to the Jordanian border crossings at [Rukban and Hadalat](#) where an estimated 37,000 people are stranded at the border (see Jordan section) or North to the [Turkish border](#) where, as of February 19, nearly 110,000 people are being accommodated in camps (see Turkey section). In February 2016, an estimated [6.6 million](#) Syrians were internally displaced in Syria.

**Eastern Mediterranean Route:** In February, 2016 UNHCR recorded [57,066](#) arrivals by boat in Greece - an 1886% increase from February 2015. Of the February arrivals in Greece by sea 52%, or 29,674, of the individuals were Syrian, a 7% increase from January 2016. The remaining arrivals were Afghan (25%) Iraqi (16%) Iranian (3%) Pakistani (3%) and of various other groups. While the journey continues to be expensive and perilous, thousands of refugees and other mixed migrants are traveling along the Eastern Mediterranean route, primarily from Turkey, each day. The average arrivals in Greece during February were [1,968](#) people each day.

In a recent UNHCR study of [Syrians](#) arriving on the Greek islands in February 2016, at least 64% of respondents had travelled directly from Syria and indicated that the average duration of the trip directly from Syria to Greece was 58 days. Of the remaining respondents 29% has previously lived in Turkey, 2% had lived in Iraq and Lebanon, respectively, and less than 1% had lived in Jordan. Conflict and violence was overwhelmingly identified as the main reason for leaving Syria, followed distantly by fear of forced recruitment and economic considerations. 88% of respondents noted that they had been internally displaced in Syria before departing.

**Europe via Bulgaria:** A smaller number of Syrians and other mixed migrants are choosing to avoid the Eastern Mediterranean Route through Greece and are instead crossing the land border between Turkey and Bulgaria. As at February 25, Bulgarian authorities had apprehended [1006](#) refugees and other mixed migrants at the Turkish border since the start of 2016. This represents an increase of 502 individuals (99.6%) since January 28, 2016. People typically cross this densely forested border on foot or at official checkpoints by hiding in vehicles or buses. While this border removes the risks of travel by sea there are reports of [push-backs](#) and [violence](#) at the border.

**Arctic Route:** The [Arctic Route](#) came into use in 2015 and was primarily used by Syrians and Afghans, though other groups are beginning to use it as well. Refugees and other mixed migrants typically travel by plane to [Moscow](#) and then by train to the Norwegian border where they cross by car or bicycle, or the Finnish border where they cross by car. Between October and December 2015, 6,000 asylum applications were registered via this route. Over [1,100](#)

refugees and migrants, approximately 20 per day, have crossed into Finland from Russia in 2016. In January alone Norway received 389 asylum applications, 75 of which were from Syrians.

**Refugee and Migrant Vulnerability:** The Eastern Mediterranean Route to Europe carries a variety of risks for Syrians, in particular those crossing the Aegean in overcrowded, often unseaworthy vessels. [46](#) deaths at sea were reported on this route in February 2016, a significant 83% decrease from January, 2016. Syrians who have made the crossing to Greece have also [reported](#) a variety of other protection concerns including physical assault, emotional abuse, threats of shooting, shelling, shipwrecks, detention, robbery, and sexual violence, among many other threats.

## JORDAN

**Arrivals:** As at February 29, 2016 UNHCR had registered [639,064](#) Syrians in Jordan an increase of 0.45% (2,895 people) since January 31, 2016. Of this group [520,438](#) Syrians (81.4%) live in urban, peri-urban, or rural locations and 118,626 (18.6%) live in camps an increase of 771 individuals and 2,124 individuals, respectively since [January 31, 2016](#). Jordan's most recent population Census, conducted in December, 2016, indicates that the country is hosting [1.26 million](#) Syrians.

Syrians are primarily entering Jordan via the North-eastern border with Syria at Hadalat and Rukban, with an average of [50 to 100](#) individuals entering the Kingdom each day.

As at January 15, 2016 there were 53,334 UNHCR registered [Iraqis](#) in Jordan. The most recent population [Census](#), conducted in December 2015, indicates a total of 130,911 Iraqis living in Jordan.

**Departures:** A January report from [EUISS](#) noted that in December 2015, as many as 70-75 Syrians per day were cancelling their registration with UNHCR and returning to Syria. In a UNHCR [study](#) conducted with Syrians arriving on the Greek islands in February, 2016, less than 1% of respondents indicated that they had lived in Jordan prior to departing for Europe, down from 2% in January, 2016.

**Syrians at the Border:** At the end of February, Jordanian Border Guard Forces reported the presence of roughly [37,000 people](#), mainly Syrians, on the berm (or ridge) outside the Jordanian border crossing points of Rukban and Hadalat. This is an increase of approximately 20,000 people (118%) since the end of January, 2016. Only [50-100](#) people are permitted to cross the borders each day, though reports of violence, riots, theft and death (particularly of pregnant women and newborn babies) are on the rise. On February 4 an aid official indicated that up to [100 people](#) had perished in the previous two weeks due to a severe winter storm, malnutrition, injuries, and poor sanitary conditions.

The reduced number of arrivals can be attributed to increased [security screenings](#) of refugees at the border, with government officials likening this process to the security screening procedures of European countries. Many Syrians pay smugglers to transport them to this border crossing, undertaking a [journey](#) of up to 21 days over rough roads and through government held territory, often with limited food and water.

## LEBANON

**Refugees in Lebanon:** Lebanon has the [highest](#) per capita concentration of refugees in the world. Strict [visa requirements](#) introduced in 2015 have severely restricted the number of Syrians entering Lebanon. Though exceptions are made for "extreme humanitarian cases," Syrians without proper visas, documentation, or a sponsor are denied access to the country. Scattered [reports](#) indicate that Syrians are still crossing the border unofficially in small numbers. On January 31, 2016 UNHCR reported [1,067,785](#) registered Syrians in Lebanon, down 1,326 (0.12%) from December 31, 2015. The government of Lebanon claims that the number of Syrians in Lebanon is closer to [1.5 million](#). [ECHO](#) reports that nearly 450,000 refugees from Palestine, 42,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria, and 6000 Iraqi refugees are in Lebanon, as at February, 2016.

**Departures:** Reports indicate that in [recent months](#) thousands of people have exited Lebanon each week via boat (from Tripoli) or plane to Turkey in hopes of moving onward to Europe. Many transit through Lebanon using a temporary transit visa. The trip costs at least USD 2000-3000, though it can be significantly more. In a [study](#) conducted by UNHCR with Syrians arriving on the Greek islands in February 2016, 2% of respondents said that they had lived in Lebanon prior to departing for Europe. There are also [reports](#) of Lebanese nationals making the journey to Europe with IOM reporting that [1,974](#) Lebanese nationals were registered as arrivals in Greece in 2015.

New [visa requirements](#) for Syrians entering Turkey from a 3<sup>rd</sup> country by air or sea, implemented in January 2016 (see Turkey section), are likely to be prohibitive for those wanting to leave Lebanon for Europe. There are no reports, however, on departures from Lebanon in February, or the implications of Turkish visa requirements.

**Deteriorating Conditions:** Deteriorating conditions are often cited as a strong [motivation](#) for the departure of Syrians from Lebanon. Limited [access](#) to healthcare and education for children, restrictions on employment, as well as deteriorating [food security](#), is leading to the increasing vulnerability of refugees in Lebanon. Unregistered refugees often have reduced mobility and difficulty accessing humanitarian services due to fears of [arrest](#). [Palestinian](#) refugees in Lebanon and Palestinian refugees from Syria are among the most vulnerable groups.

**Border Accessibility:** Officials maintain that [Lebanon](#) is not a country of asylum, nor a final destination for refugees. In October 2014 the Lebanese Social Affairs [Minister](#) said that Lebanon was, in effect, no longer receiving Syrian refugees, with some humanitarian (and medical) exceptions. [ECHO](#) reports that strict visa requirements mean that the Lebanese border is ‘de-facto’ closed to those who are fleeing violence, including Syrians.

## TURKEY

**Arrivals:** As at February 29, 2016 UNHCR had registered [2,688,686](#) Syrians in Turkey an increase of 2,503,549 individuals (7.4%) over the past two months since December 31, 2016. New [visa requirements](#) were implemented on January 8, 2016 for Syrians arriving in Turkey from a third border by air or sea. The same requirements do not apply to Syrians crossing the land border. Despite this, thousands of Syrians are reportedly [stranded](#) at Turkey’s southern border with Syria, after increased fighting in Damascus has forced them to flee (See below).

In early February Turkey tightened its visa requirements for [Iraqis](#) entering the country. Where they could formerly obtain a 30 day visa at the Turkish border, Iraqis are now required to pre-apply for an electronic or paper visa. Turkish officials say that the move comes in a continued attempt to fight ‘illegal migration’.

**Departures to Europe:** The [Turkish Coast Guard](#) reported 182 ‘irregular migration’ cases in February 2016 involving 8,748 ‘irregular migrants’. The Coast Guard also reported the apprehension of 25 ‘organizers’ of irregular migration. UNHCR reported [57,066](#) arrivals in Greece (almost exclusively from Turkey) in February, 2016 a decline of 10,349 individuals (15.3%) as compared to January 2016 reflecting a [slowing number](#) of arrivals due to rough seas and inclement weather during the winter months. IOM reports that [cold weather](#) in mid-February contributed to a brief but sharp drop in arrivals from Turkey. The majority of these refugees and other asylum seekers transit through Turkey and depart from Izmir or Bodrum on the Turkish coast arriving at the [Greek islands](#) of Kos, Lesbos, Rhodes, Kalymnos, Samos Megisti, Chios, and Leros.

In [February](#) the main groups of arrivals were Syrians (52%), Afghans (25%), Iraqis (16%), Iranians (3%), Pakistanis (3%) and smaller percentages of other nationalities. IOM research indicates that Syrians are paying anywhere from [USD1000-5000](#) for the entire journey direct from Syria. Afghans and Iraqis taking the same route through Turkey and Greece to Europe reported similar costs though 17% and 10%, respectively, reported paying more than USD 5000 for the journey.

A smaller but growing number of refugees and mixed migrants depart from Turkey via the Northern border with Bulgaria. Bulgarian authorities have reported the apprehension of [1,006](#) refugees and other mixed migrants since the beginning of 2016 with Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, Pakistanis, and Iranians making up the majority of those apprehended. ACAPS reports that as of early February 2016, [70%](#) of people transiting Bulgaria were Afghan. People cross primarily at the Turkish border near Edirne and Kırklareli.

**Afghan Asylum Seekers:** Afghans continue to enter Turkey through Iran on route to Europe via Greece and Bulgaria. Interviews conducted with [Afghans](#) in Greece during February 2016, show that 80% of respondents left their country of origin because of ongoing conflict and violence. The direct journey from Afghanistan to Greece takes approximately 48 days through (Pakistan,) Iran, and Turkey. 71% of respondents came directly from Afghanistan while 26% indicated that they have been living in Iran prior to departure.

[ACAPS](#) indicates that Afghans are increasingly using Turkey’s border with Bulgaria to enter Europe as they are now banned from entering the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

**Smugglers:** A recent report by [IRIN](#) illuminates Turkey’s ongoing fight against smugglers who transport refugees and other mixed migrants in overcrowded and often unseaworthy boats and dinghies across the Aegean to Greece.

Turkey has strengthened its anti-smuggling campaign by deploying additional police officers and gendarmerie troops along the coast, as well as conducting raids on sub-standard boat-producing factories. According to the report, however, smugglers move and adapt, often using social media to advertise their prices (which, in February, have dropped to roughly half of what they were in the summer months), and earning up to USD 20,000 during a busy month. In mid-February [NATO](#) deployed three warships in the Aegean to target smuggling operations and ‘assist with the refugee and migrant crisis.

[FRONTEX](#) reports that smugglers operate in networks along the Turkish coast, with each network controlling a specific departure area and often serving specific nationalities (Syrian, Afghan, Pakistani, Bangladeshi etc.). Beyond offering passage to Greece, or in some cases across the Turkish land border with Syria, smugglers also reportedly provide information on asylum processes in destination countries as well as forged documentation.

**Refugee and Migrant Vulnerability:** The Eastern Mediterranean route continues to present serious risks for vulnerable refugees and other mixed migrants en route to Europe. At the Turkish border, where thousands of Syrians have gathered since early February, reports of [attacks](#), beatings, and [shootings](#) by Turkish border guards, against those trying to cross the border unofficially, are becoming more frequent.

Rough waters, poor winter conditions and sub-standard boats continue to result in deaths at sea during the crossing from Turkey to Greece. [IOM](#) reports 46 fatalities on the Eastern Mediterranean route in February and a total of 321 deaths in the first two months of 2016. Physical abuse and robbery at the hands of [smugglers](#) has also been reported along this route in February.

[Violence](#), [extortion](#), and push-backs at the Bulgarian border are a reported risk for refugees and other mixed migrants attempting to take this route. In early February, Turkish news outlets reported [31 Syrians](#) who were ‘deported’ from Bulgaria being rescued from freezing temperatures and pouring rain by Turkish villagers and security forces.

**Syrians at the Border:** Despite claims by [Turkish officials](#) that Turkey maintains an ‘open door’ policy for refugees, closed borders have led to an increase in irregular crossings. Some Syrians have described [beatings](#) at the Turkish border, others recounted experiences of being detained or expelled. Multiple sources, including [activists](#), [Syrians](#), and [others](#), report that Turkey closed its last two official border crossings (Cilvegozu and Öncüpınar crossings) in March, 2015. [Turkish officials](#) maintain that despite past temporary restrictions on movement due to security concerns, the ‘open door’ policy is still in place, and that Turkey is not stopping people from crossing the border.

In early February 2016 increased fighting in [Aleppo](#) forced thousands of Syrians to flee for the Turkish border where they remain stranded and unable to leave Syria. Varying estimates claim there are between [30,000 and 50,000](#) Syrians, mostly women and children, gathered near the Syrian city of Azaz hoping to cross through the Öncüpınar/Bab al-Salam border gate. Authorities maintain that the border remains open for “[emergency situations](#).” As of February 19 the UN estimated that [58,000](#) Syrians had arrived at the Syria-Turkey border in the past two weeks, bringing the total number of people being sheltered in camps on the Syrian side of the border to roughly 110,000. Turkish officials claimed 10,000 people had been allowed to cross the border. [Amnesty International](#) has reported shootings and injury to Syrians who have tried to cross the border unofficially with the help of smugglers.

**Changing Routes:** [IRIN](#) reports that refugees and other mixed migrants are finding new routes to Europe in an attempt to avoid passing through Greece. The high costs and risks of traveling to Greece by sea, coupled with the threat of violence and anti-migrant rhetoric, as well as the closing of FYROM’s border with Greece, are leading many to avoid Greece entirely and head to Europe via [Bulgaria](#). Bulgarian authorities have apprehended [1124](#) refugees and other mixed migrants so far in 2016, the majority at irregular land borders.

Refugees and other mixed migrants are continuing to find new routes as old ones close. The [Arctic Route](#), for example, became prominent in 2015 whereby Syrians and Afghans travel through Russia and cross into Europe via land borders with Norway and Finland. Additionally, while [Macedonia](#) has effectively blocked the Balkan Route by closing its border with Greece (though people have found ways through the fence), refugees and other mixed migrants are continuing to arrive in [Serbia](#) by transiting, instead, through Bulgaria.

## IRAQ

**Refugees in Iraq:** As at February 29, 2016 UNHCR had registered [246,051](#) Syrians in Iraq an increase of 1,029

individuals (0.41%) since January 15, 2016. Of those Syrians in Iraq 61% (149,145) live in urban, peri-urban or rural locations, while 39% (96,906) live in camps. [98%](#) of all Syrians in Iraq live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I).

Movement of Syrians across the [Syrian-Iraqi](#) borders continues at the Peshkabout and Ibrahim Khalil (re-opened on January 17, 2016) border crossings in Northern Iraq. [3,972 Syrians](#) arrived in KR-I via the Peshkabout border crossing in January, 2016 (marking the lowest monthly arrivals in a year) and 802 Syrians returned to Syria. February figures are unavailable at this time.

**Displacement:** In February 2016 [IOM](#) identified over 3.3 million internally displaced Iraqis, primarily hosted in the governorates of Baghdad, Anbar, and Dohuk. This marks an increase of roughly [200,000](#) internally displaced individuals (6%) since June, 2015. Ongoing conflict and insecurity in Iraq continues to displace thousands of citizens. [670 Iraqis](#) were killed and 1,290 injured by armed conflict, violence, or acts of terrorism in February alone.

**Iraqis Going to Europe:** In the first two months of 2016, IOM reports that [20,484](#) Iraqis have arrived in Greece by boat. 8,149 of these individuals arrived in February marking a 34% decrease from 12,335 individuals in January. UNHCR estimates that during February, 2016 [16%](#) of boat arrivals in Greece were Iraqi, down from 18% in January, 2016 and [25%](#) in December, 2015.

A recent [IOM](#) report, based on the results of questionnaires distributed to Iraqis in Europe, illuminates the varied motivations, routes, and challenges faced by Iraqis when making the journey to Europe. Among 473 respondents 80% indicated that their primary reason for departure from Iraq was ‘no hope for the future’ with others indicating that general security concerns, unemployment, targeted violence, and the opportunity to join family members were amongst their motivations. In this research 90% of Iraqis said that they had transited through Turkey with 94% exiting Iraq through formal exit points by land or air. Of the 4% who exited the country informally, this happened primarily by land at the Baziyan and Gali Rash borders with Turkey, or at the Khanera border with Iran. The vast majority of Iraqis transited legally through Turkey and continued their journey informally through Europe for an average cost of USD 6000 per person. 67% of respondents indicated no intention to return to Iraq. The report is accessible [here](#).

## OTHER REGIONAL NEWS

**Supporting Syria and the Region Conference:** An international [conference](#), hosted by the UK, Germany, Kuwait, Norway, and the United Nations, was held on February 4 in London. During the conference world leaders convened to raise funds to meet the immediate and long term needs of those affected by the Syrian conflict. The conference raised over [USD 11 million](#) in pledges.

**WFP to Restore Full Rations to Syrians:** On February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016 the [World Food Programme](#) announced that funds raised during the ‘Supporting Syria and the Region Conference’ will allow the UN organization to fully reinstate food assistance to Syrians in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt. This assistance will last from March 2016 through to the end of the year, and will also include food baskets for families inside Syria from April to October 2016.

**Closures and Violence at the Greek-FYROM Border:** On [February 21](#), 2016 FYROM introduced more intensive documents checks for Syrians and Iraqis attempting to cross its border with Greece, while for the first time barring Afghans from crossing. This decision has left thousands of asylum seekers and other mixed migrants stranded in Greece, despite Greek [appeals](#) for the opening of the border. As at February 29 nearly [8000 people](#) were stranded at the border camp of Idomeni, while conditions continued to deteriorate amid limited resources. On this same day hundreds of Iraqi and Syrians migrants attempted to storm the border fences by [force](#). The razor wire fence was ripped open as men used a steel post to break the barrier. Police in FYROM responded with tear gas and stun grenades.

**Cessation of Hostilities in Syria:** On February 12, 2016, after talks in Munich, Germany, world powers came to an agreement for a [cessation of hostilities](#) in Syria. The cessation began on [February 27, 2016](#) and applies to the Syrian government and other armed groups, though not to the battle against the so-called Islamic State or al-Nusra Front. Brokered by the US and Russia, and endorsed by the [UN Security Council](#), the cessation was intended to jump start peace talks and to allow for humanitarian access to besieged areas.

See also **MHUB Monthly Trend Bulletins** (accessible [here](#)).

## NEW RESEARCH, REPORTS OR DOCUMENTS

Three major reports about refugees in Lebanon were released in February, 2016. Among these is an **Amnesty International** report on the protection concerns of Syrian and Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon. The report draws from research done with 77 women in Lebanon in 2015 and highlights the risks of gender based violence and exploitation that refugee women face in the country (report accessible [here](#)).

The **Palestinian Return Centre** also launched its newest report in February entitled ‘The “Forgotten People”: Assessing Poverty Among Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon’ (accessible [here](#)). The publication looks at the socio-economic condition of Palestinians in Lebanon while distinguishing between Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (PRL) and Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS).

The **London School of Economics – Middle East Centre** has released its 15<sup>th</sup> paper (accessible [here](#)) in an ongoing series of publications highlighting topics and issues in the Middle East. The most recent paper looks at the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon with particular focus on the political dynamics in Lebanon and the role of local administrations and international organizations.

Similarly two useful and in-depth country profiles of Syria were released in February. The first, produced by **ACAPS**, offers a comprehensive overview of Syria ranging from its historical background, to its economy and governance, and focusing specifically on humanitarian and development stakeholders and the infrastructure they provide. The report is accessible [here](#).

The **Migration Policy Centre** has similarly released a policy brief offering a migration-centred profile of Syria (accessible [here](#)). The brief focuses on outward migration from Syria and the changing reception policies of Syria’s neighbouring countries in the last four years, all while commenting on the effects this has had regarding migration to Europe.

Another report published by the **Migration Policy Centre** examines the reception challenges faced by EU states in the wake of increased asylum seeker arrivals in Europe. Entitled ‘Getting the Balance Right: Strengthening Asylum Reception Capacity at National and EU Levels’ the report highlights the failures of state reception systems and the precarious situations in which refugees and migrants are placed as a result. Report accessible [here](#).

In February **IOM** released a new report entitled ‘Migration Flows from Iraq to Europe’ (accessible [here](#)). The report is based on questionnaires, conducted in November and December, with Iraqis who had left Iraq in 2015 and were living in Europe at the time of the research. The findings offer a variety of data relating to the profiles of respondents, decision making strategies, routes used, and expectations and misconceptions in countries of destination.

**UNHCR** has launched a new and ongoing study based on surveys conducted with Afghan and Syrian arrivals in Greece. Results of the ‘profiling exercise’ have been released for January (accessible [here](#)) and February (accessible [here](#) and [here](#)) and offer useful data regarding demographic factors, motivations, routes taken, length of stay in neighbouring countries, and assistance received en route. The study is expected to continue on a monthly basis for the first half of 2016.

**RMMS** has released its February monthly summary of mixed migration issues and news in the Horn of Africa and Yemen region (accessible [here](#)).