

DRS DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL

Stranded at the Border:
Policy Changes and Migration Realities

SUMMARY OF REGIONAL
MIGRATION TRENDS

MIDDLE EAST

JUNE / JULY - 2016



This summary is produced by DRC Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional office. It covers inter and intra-regional displacement and displacement induced mobility drawing widely from available sources in the region. Given the complex migration trends taking place in the Middle East, this summary is intended to give a consolidated snapshot of mixed migration in the 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

Cover Photo Credit: Overview of the Zaatari Refugee Camp during a sand storm.



Photo: Eduardo Soteras Jalil

KEY MIDDLE EAST MIGRATION TRENDS

Closing Borders: The borders surrounding Syria are becoming increasingly closed, limiting the ability of people within Syria to seek protection internationally. For Syrians today, very few legal routes to exit the country remain. Their situation is characterised by tightly controlled land borders, strict visa requirements to enter Lebanon, a recently closed Jordanian border, and visa requirements for entry to Turkey by sea or air.

Declining Arrivals in Greece: June and July continue to mark significantly declining arrivals of refugees and other mixed migrants in Greece compared to the same months in 2015. Both months show a significant decrease from 2015 arrivals with June 2016 arrivals down 95.0% from the same month in 2015, and July arrivals down 96.5% from the same month in 2015. The European Commission points to the “sharp and continued decline” in irregular arrivals to Greece as evidence of the “successful implementation” of the EU-Turkey Agreement.

Limited Returns under the EU-Turkey Agreement: As of July 28, 2016 UNHCR reports that 468 people have been returned to Turkey from Greece since the implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement, only 31 of whom were Syrian. The number of returns are widely thought to be quite low, prompting media and commentators to describe the deal as ‘dying,’ ‘faltering,’ and ‘sputter[ing]’.

No Evidence of Shifting Routes: Despite the drastic decreases in arrivals by sea to Greece in recent months, there is no significant evidence to show that migration flows have shifted to the Central Mediterranean Route or elsewhere in June and July. The Central Mediterranean route (from North Africa to Italy) has shown increasing use with 23,552 arrivals recorded in Italy in July compared to 1,920 in Greece. This number, however, is consistent with arrival figures for Italy in 2015 and reflects an increase in summer usage of the route, noted in past years. As at July 31, 2016 IOM reported that 328 Syrians had arrived by sea in Italy in 2016, a 94% decrease from the 5,495 arrivals during the same period in 2015.

Jordanian Border Closure: Following a suicide bombing near the informal settlement at Rukban on June 21, Jordanian authorities declared the Northern and Northeastern borders with Syria and Iraq a closed militarized zone, effectively closing the border to Syrians and suspending humanitarian aid to the area. Estimates in July indicate that some 70,000 Syrians were stranded in the newly militarized zone at Jordan’s North-Eastern border with Syria, though WFP claims that this number could be as high as 100,000.

Arrivals of Afghans and citizens of Pakistan in Greece: Afghan refugees are a key group among those leaving Turkey for Greece with a reported 416 arriving in Greece by sea in June and July 2016. The number of citizens of Pakistan arriving in Greece is also notable as the 345 arrivals in July 2016 marked a 48% increase from arrivals in June. It remains to be seen if this trend will continue.

Syrians at the Turkish Border: An estimated 160,000 Syrians remain stranded in makeshift camps in Syria near the Turkish border. Authorities maintain that the border remains open for “emergency situations” though reports indicate it has been closed for 17 months.

Syrians in Iraq: As of June 30, 2016 there were 249,395 Syrians registered in Iraq marking an increase of 2,056 individuals (0.8%) since the last available figures on May 31, 2016. According to UNHCR, 2,261 Syrians crossed into KR-I at the Peshkhabour border in June of 2016. They were admitted on 15 day entry visas and barred access to asylum. Additionally 9 Syrians were deported from the Gawilan refugee camp despite UNHCR interventions.

Iraqis in Syria: As of June 30, 2016 more than 7,000 Iraqis had fled the escalating violence around the city of Mosul and arrived at the Syrian camp of Al-Hol, 14 km from the Iraqi border. On June 30 more than 5,000 Iraqis were still in the camp while others had used it as a point of transit or returned back to KR-I.

Returnees from Europe: Reports indicate a growing number of Iraqis voluntarily returning to Iraq after travelling to Europe and facing closed borders, unemployment, poor living conditions, disappointment and struggle. As of June 2016 nearly 300 Iraqi refugees had voluntarily returned from Greece, and ‘thousands’ more had returned from elsewhere in Europe, though no specific numbers were available. Additional reports indicate that some Syrians in Greece are paying smugglers to help them cross the Evros River in Northern Greece and irregularly enter Turkey. Syrians cite poor conditions, camp closures, and restricted access to other European countries as reasons for returning to Turkey, and for some, their country of origin.

SYRIA

Syrian Refugees: With the conflict in Syria currently in its sixth year, ongoing fighting continues to displace thousands of Syrians both within and outside of the country. As of July 31, 2016 UNHCR has registered a total of **4,813,179** Syrian refugees, in neighbouring countries and North Africa, since the conflict began. This marks a decrease in registered Syrians of 0.5% (25,441 individuals) since May 31, 2016. Of the total UNHCR registered Syrian refugees, **90%** live in urban, peri-urban, or rural areas, while only 10% live in formal camps. At the end of June, 2016 the number of Syrians seeking asylum in Europe was at **1,095,097** with 27,452 asylum applications made in June alone.

Refugees in Syria: As of June 30, 2016, there were a reported **28,932** refugees and asylum seekers in Syria. Of these, 24,027 were Iraqi, 1,521 Afghan, 910 Sudanese, 511 Somali, 179 citizens of Pakistan, and 1,784 individuals of various other nationalities. An estimated **450,000** Palestinian refugees also remain in Syria. UNHCR reports that the number of refugees in the country is **decreasing** as the security situation worsens.

Conflict and Displacement: By the end of July, 2016 a reported **6,563,462** people were internally displaced within Syria, including an estimated 2.8 million children. The **majority** are in the rural Damascus and Aleppo governorates. As at July 31, 2016 UNHCR figures show a total of **321,957** people displaced from affected areas of Aleppo, Idleb, Homs, Ar-Raqqa, Lattakia, and Deir Ez-Zor governorates in Northern Syria as a result of fighting since February, 2016. In the last week of July alone, some 8,000 people were displaced in Aleppo where hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been trapped under **siege**. More than **78,000** people were displaced from Menbij town (in Aleppo governorate) due to ongoing **hostilities** in June and July. As of July 17, an additional **2,500 people** had been displaced in Al-Hasakeh governorate since the end of May bringing the total number of IDPs to 47,689 due to fighting since February.

Closing Borders: The **borders** surrounding Syria are becoming **increasingly** closed, **limiting** the ability of people within Syria to seek protection internationally. For Syrians today, very few legal routes to exit the country remain. Their situation is characterised by tightly controlled land borders, strict visa requirements to enter **Lebanon**, a recently closed **Jordanian** border, and visa requirements for entry to **Turkey** by sea or air, though limited irregular entry by land still occurs.

At the end of July 2016, an estimated **160,000** people were stranded in Syria along the Turkish border. The border has remained closed for the past **17 months**, with some medical exceptions (see Turkey section). There are also thousands of Syrians stranded between the two berms at Syria's southern border with Jordan (see Jordan section). Exact figures are unknown, but estimates range between **70,000** and **100,000** Syrians stranded in arid and poor conditions in this newly militarized zone between the Jordan-Syria borders.

On March 8, 2016 the **Balkan route** became closed to refugees and other mixed migrants following official border closures in Macedonia (FYROM), Croatia, and Slovenia. By the end of July 2016, these closures effectively left more than **57,000** refugees and mixed migrants, including thousands of Syrians, stranded in Greece.

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Eastern Mediterranean Route: In June 2016 UNHCR reported **1,554** arrivals by boat in Greece from Turkey, and a further **1,920** arrivals in July, making a total of 3,474 arrivals since May 31, 2016. While June represented a decrease of 9.7% from May figures, July represented a 23.5% increase from June. Both months show a significant decrease from 2015 arrivals with **June 2016** arrivals down 95.0% from the same month in 2015, and July arrivals down 96.5% from the same month in 2015. Of the recorded arrivals by sea in June and July **969** were Syrian, 578 citizens of Pakistan, 416 Afghan, 287 Iraqi, and 246 Algerian. The average daily arrivals in June and July were **52** and **62** respectively, compared to an average of **56** arrivals per day in May. IOM reported **no deaths** along the Eastern Mediterranean route in June and **7** in July. There were no deaths reported in May.

Other Routes: Usage of the Eastern Mediterranean Route has **decreased** in recent months following the EU-Turkey Agreement (see Turkey section) and closure of the Balkan route to Europe, while the Central Mediterranean route (from North Africa to Italy) has shown **increasing** use. This does not indicate, however, that migration flows are shifting from the Eastern to the Central Route in the wake of EU policy changes. 1,920 arrivals by sea were recorded in Greece during July 2016, compared to **23,552** arrivals recorded in Italy during the same month. A reported **54 Syrians** used the Central Mediterranean Route in June, as well as 93 Afghans, and 43 Iraqis, an increase from February 2016 when none of these nationalities used the route, and March when only 10 Syrians were reported. The increase is likely related to the rising temperatures and better conditions at sea during the **summer**, a time when use of the Central Mediterranean Route has increased in **past years** including 2015. As at July 31, 2016 IOM reported that 328 Syrians had arrived by sea in Italy in 2016, a 94% decrease from the 5,495 arrivals during the same period in 2015, indicating that this route has not yet become one of significant use for Syrians.

The **Migration Policy Institute** and **FRONTEX** similarly claim that it is not possible to link increasing arrivals in Italy to shifting migration routes following changes in EU policy. **Arrivals** in Italy are primarily from Nigeria, Eritrea, Gambia, Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Somalia, Mali, and Senegal. A statement by the **European Commission** on July 8, 2016 acknowledges that while a small number (unspecified) of boats are arriving in Italy directly from Egypt and Turkey, that it is not possible to confirm the development of a new travel route to Italy.

Despite the closure of the Balkan route to Europe and **fears** that the EU-Turkey Agreement would significantly shift migration routes to the Bulgarian border, **Bulgarian officials** report that the number of refugees and other mixed migrants entering from Turkey has dropped (see Turkey section below).

Syrians Stranded in Seoul: **Refugees Deeply** reports that in early June some 28 Syrians had been trapped at Incheon International Airport in **South Korea** for at least 2 months. South Korea denied the asylum applications of around 180 people (including the 28 Syrians) who have since been living in the airport's deportation room. **Other migrants** from Thailand, China, Egypt, Kazakhstan, and Pakistan are among those trapped in the airport.

JORDAN

Syrian Refugees in Jordan: As of July 31, 2016 UNHCR had registered **657,048** Syrians in Jordan. This marks an increase of 1,986 individuals (up 0.3%) from two months prior on **May 31, 2016**. Of this group, 78.5% (515,781 individuals) live in urban, peri-urban, or rural areas (a decrease of 2,243 individuals since May 31) and 21.5% (141,267 individuals) live in camps (an increase of 4,229 individuals from May 31). **ACAPS** reports a pattern of Syrian refugees living outside of camps in Jordan returning to camps in 2016, while UNHCR data indicates that **90%** of registered Syrians in urban areas are living below the poverty line and that more than 2/3 of Syrian families are living in **debt**. Jordanian **leadership** and the 2015 Population **Census**, however, indicate that roughly **1.3 million** Syrians are residing in the country.

IRIN reports that as of June 9, 2016 Jordanian authorities were allowing 100-200 Syrians to enter the country at its Northeastern border each day, marking a decline from the 400-500 daily arrivals in mid-May. Arrivals ceased when the borders with Syria and Iraq were **closed** on June 21, 2016 following attacks at the border near Rukban (see 'Violence and Border Closure' below).

Though Jordan closed its Northern and Northeastern borders with Syria on June 21, 2016, UNHCR reported on July 31 that **6,252** Syrians have arrived in Jordan since May 31, 2016, bringing the total arrivals of Syrians in 2016 to 32,925. It is unclear why the number of arrivals in the reporting period does not match the number of newly registered Syrians as reported by **UNHCR**.

Other Refugee Populations in Jordan: As of July 31, 2016 UNHCR reports **56,690** Iraqis registered in Jordan, up 2.8% (1,528 individuals) from the **55,162** Iraqis registered on April 30, 2016. The number of **Yemeni refugees** in Jordan was most recently recorded by UNHCR at **4,235** individuals as of May 31, 2016, marking an increase of 164 people (up 4%) since April 30, for a total of 383 individuals since **March 31, 2016**. A recent report produced by **ARDD**, suggests that there may be Yemenis in Jordan who are unaccounted for by both the government and UNHCR. Since December, 2015, Yemenis have been required to purchase and present **visas** to enter Jordan.

Additionally, in the most recently available figures from **May 31, 2016**, UNHCR had registered 3,063 Sudanese (an 8 person increase from April 30) and 786 Somalis (a 9 person increase) in Jordan.

Returns: **Anecdotal accounts** from refugees at the Rukban area of the berm indicate that in early July an estimated 15 to 20 families were returning to Syria each day, following the closure of the Jordanian border. Human Rights watch confirms stories that families are **returning** to Syria due to the appalling conditions at the berm. **ACAPS** reports that returns to Syria from Jordan have continued throughout 2016 though at slower rates than the previous year due to deteriorating security conditions in Syria.

Violence and Border Closure: Following a **suicide bombing** near the informal settlement at Rukban on June 21, Jordanian authorities declared the Northern and Northeastern borders with Syria and **Iraq** a **closed militarized zone**, effectively closing the border to **Syrians** and suspending **humanitarian aid** to the area. The **attack**, which killed 7 Jordanian soldiers and wounded 13, was later claimed by the so-called Islamic State. On July 12 UNHCR reached an agreement with the Jordanian government to deliver a one-time **30-day food ration** to Syrians stranded in the demilitarized border zone, though

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no official **date** was set for the delivery. As at July 31, despite **requests** from **aid** groups, **no food**, aid, or other humanitarian items had been delivered to the Syrians stranded on the berm since the closures on June 21. People stranded in these makeshift shelters have limited access to **water**, **food**, and **medical aid** as temperatures reach **50 degrees Celsius**.

Syrians at the Border: Estimates in July indicate that some **70,000** Syrians were stranded in the **newly militarized** zone at Jordan's North-Eastern border with Syria, though WFP claims that this number could be as high as **100,000**. More than 30,000 of those Syrians trapped at the border are **children**. These numbers mark an increase from UNHCR's estimates of **68,000 Syrians** at the border at the end of May, 2016. The unmarked **border** runs between two **berms**, making it **unclear** whether tens of thousands of individuals stranded near the crossing points of Rukban (estimated **71,000** individuals) and Hadalat (estimated **7,000** individuals) are on Syrian or Jordanian territory. These numbers remain estimates due to the **inability** of aid agencies, journalists, and the Jordanian military to enter the demilitarised zone. A reportedly arid, desert environment, sources have described **conditions** at the berm as 'horrendous' for the thousands of **Syrians** who have waited at the border for months. Reports of **disease**, **theft**, **riots**, **violence**, and **deaths** are all common.

During May 2016, daily admissions at the border increased from roughly **200-250** individuals per day in April to a peak of **400-500**. Before the June 21 closure of the border, Jordanian **authorities** maintained **rigorous inspections** of refugees entering the country and sent more than **12,000 new arrivals** to a fenced in compound called 'Village 5' in the Azraq refugee camp for further security check. According to **IRIN**, Syrians living in Village 5 are unable to leave save for those with special medical needs and only under the observation of Jordanian intelligence agents. Health services, education, and other resources in Village 5 are **limited**. In February 2016, Jordanian leadership indicated that there were '**elements**' of the so-called Islamic State among Syrians at the border. In May, the head of the Jordanian border guard claimed that roughly **2,000** Syrians at the border are suspected of involvement with the group.



Darashakran Camp - Photo credit: Noe Falk Nielsen

LEBANON

as of June 30, 2016 there were

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Sex trafficking

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Refugees in Lebanon: UNHCR's most recent figures indicate that as of June 30, 2016 there were **1,033,513** registered Syrians in Lebanon, a decrease of 1.4% (14,762 individuals) from the previous figures reported on March 31, 2016. Registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon make up **24.6%** of the country's total population. The **government** of Lebanon and **OCHA** estimate that the total number of Syrians in the country is closer to 1.5 million, making Lebanon the country with the **highest** concentration of refugees in proportion to its population in the world. While there are no formal refugee camps for Syrians in Lebanon, roughly **16%** of Syrians live in informal settlements around the country.

The number of registered Syrians in Lebanon has been in **decline** since April 2015 when **1,185,241** Syrians were registered by UNHCR. The decline is due to a number of issues; the ongoing **inactivation** of refugee registration in Lebanon's national refugee database, a government ordered **suspension** of new registrations, **restrictive visa entry requirements** and prohibitive **residency renewal** fees have pushed many Syrians into becoming undocumented. According to the Lebanese Social Affairs **Minister**, the country is, in effect, no longer receiving refugees, though scattered **reports** indicate that some Syrians are crossing the border **irregularly**.

As at June 30, 2016 **OCHA** reports indicated that 277,985 Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRL) were in the country as well as 40,807 Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS). These figures have not altered from OCHA's March reports. Roughly **53%** of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in 12 recognised camps. According to **ACAPS**, entry for PRS into Lebanon is almost entirely limited to third country transit.

Intentions and Motivations: According to the results of focus group and surveys conducted by **UNHCR** in June 2016, 49% of consulted Syrians intended to remain in Lebanon and return to Syria when conditions are safe (a result echoing findings by **Al Jazeera** from May). 39% of those surveyed were interested in moving to a third country, 7% wanted to return to Syria in the immediate future, and 5% were unsure. Key motivators for those who wished to leave Lebanon included inadequate support for severe health conditions and lack of higher educational opportunities.

Departures: Prior to January 2016, **thousands** of Syrians and other mixed migrants were passing through and exiting Lebanon each **week** by boat (from Tripoli) or plane to Turkey and then onward to Europe. This movement reached its peak in September 2015 with **6000** departures per week. **Visa requirements** for Syrians entering Turkey from a third country by air or sea, (implemented in January 2016, see Turkey section), have made transiting through Lebanon to Turkey nearly **impossible** for Syrians.

Violence and Detention: Following multiple suicide bombings in the predominantly Christian, border-village of **al-Qaa** on June 27, 2016, Lebanese troops **raided** nearby makeshift border camps of Syrian refugees, purportedly searching the area for 'more terrorists.' According to **IRIN**, authorities have made no explicit connection between Syrians in Lebanon and the attacks, reports indicate that some 700 Syrians were detained in the days following the attacks. While **reports** claim that most of those arrested have been released, and that no Syrians were deported, the Lebanese NGO, **ALEF**, reported to **IRIN** that as of July 28, 2016 more than 400 people were still being detained.

Trafficking: In July, **Human Rights Watch** released a report highlighting the risk of trafficking faced by Syrian women in Lebanon, and calling for improved law enforcement, police coordination, and support for survivors. **Sex trafficking** of Syrian women is an ongoing concern in Lebanon as highlighted by the dismantling of the country's largest known **sex trafficking ring** in March 2016.



Darashakran Camp - Photo credit: Noe Falk Nielsen

TURKEY

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Arrivals: As of July 28, 2016, UNHCR figures indicate **2,728,986** Syrians are registered and granted temporary protection status in Turkey. This marks a decrease of 14,511 individuals (down 0.5%) during the reporting period from figures on June 2, 2016. The number has been decreasing in recent months from a peak of **2,749,862** registered Syrians in Turkey on May 2, 2016. Roughly **8%** of Syrians live in 26 camps near the border with Syria, while 72% live outside camps in urban areas.

Figures from June 2016 indicate that there are **271,466** asylum applicants seeking protection in Turkey. Among these are 123,584 Iraqis, 109,012 Afghans, 26,974 Iranians, and 3,887 Somalis among various other nationalities. Turkey is a key country on the migration route linking Asia/the Middle East to Europe.

Despite claims by **Turkish officials** that Turkey **maintains** an 'open door' policy for **emergency situations**, border closures in **March 2015**, and strict **visa requirements** for Syrians entering by air or sea, have made the border very difficult, if not impossible, to cross **legally**. Those refugees and other mixed migrants who do cross are often doing so irregularly and with the help of **smugglers**. NGOs working along the Turkey-Syria border have reported that only **critical medical cases** are being legally **allowed** into Turkey. Turkish legislation ensures the non-penalisation of irregular Syrian entry.

Scattered reports indicate that some Syrians are crossing into Turkey **unofficially** outside of regular border crossings, without figures to indicate the scale of irregular crossings. Additional **reports** indicate that some Syrians in Greece are paying smugglers to help them cross the Evros river in Northern Greece and irregularly enter Turkey. Syrians cite poor conditions, camp closures, and restricted access to other European countries as reasons for returning to Turkey, and for some, their country of origin.

Displacement: **ACAPS** reports that internal displacement has grown in Turkey's, majority-**Kurdish**, Southeast in 2016 with 355,000 residents displaced from their homes in April 2016, and an estimated **70,000** people forcibly displaced in Mardin province in July 2016. **Human Rights Watch** claims that the Turkish government is preventing NGOs and journalists from accessing the area.

Departures to Europe: The **Turkish Coast Guard** reported 15 'irregular migration' incidents in the seas surrounding Turkey, in June 2016 involving 538 'irregular migrants,' 571 less than the May, 2016 total. In July, 28 incidents were reported involving **881** individuals, an increase of 343 from June. In June 2016 UNHCR reported **1,554** arrivals by boat in Greece from Turkey, and a further **1,920** arrivals in July, making a total of 3,474 individuals since May 31, 2016. Where June represented a decrease of 9.7% from May figures, July represented a 23.5% increase from June. Of the recorded arrivals by sea in June and July **969** were Syrian, 578 citizens of Pakistan, 416 Afghan, 287 Iraqi, and 246 Algerian.

The **European Commission** points to the "sharp and continued decline" in irregular arrivals to Greece (see Syria section) as evidence of the "successful implementation" of the EU-Turkey Agreement. These declining numbers are attributable to the closing of the Balkan Route and the **EU-Turkey Agreement**. Initially the agreement did little to stop the flows of refugees and other mixed migrants to Greece, with 15 boats filled with more than 800 people each reaching Lesbos on **March 20** alone, but within a **week** arrivals had dwindled to hundreds or less each day. The average daily arrivals in June and July were **52** and **62** respectively, compared to an average of **56** arrivals per day in May, **122** per day in April, **870** per day in March, and **1,968** per day in February.

According to **Bulgarian officials**, the number of refugees and other mixed migrants crossing the Bulgarian border from Turkey has continued to drop despite the closure of

the Balkan route to Europe and the implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement. In the first six months of 2016, Bulgarian officials detained roughly **14,000** 'migrants', a 33.3% decrease from the 21,000 detained during the same period in 2015. The number of refugees and other mixed migrants arriving in Bulgaria before the **failed coup** in Turkey had reportedly been **easing**, and according to Bulgarian **authorities**, strengthened border patrols along the border have resulted in the detention of 150 – 200 people per day since the coup. Bulgarian officials attribute the dropping numbers to increased **Turkish policing** at the border. As of March 31, 2016, **Iraqis** were the largest group apprehended by Bulgarian authorities at the border followed by Syrians, Afghans, and citizens of Pakistan.

Afghan refugees are a key group among those leaving Turkey for Greece with a reported **416** arriving in Greece by sea in June and July 2016. In the early months of 2016, **Afghans** entered Turkey through Iran en route to Europe via Greece and Bulgaria. The number of citizens of Pakistan arriving in Greece throughout the reporting period is also notable as the **345** arrivals in July 2016 marked a 48% increase from arrivals in June.

EU-Turkey Agreement: The EU-Turkey Agreement has been connected to the significant **decline** in Greek arrivals by sea in 2016 while at the same time resulting in **fewer** deportations to Turkey and **resettlement** to the EU than expected. The deal has been described as increasingly **'shaky'** and **'crumbling,'** with Turkey threatening, at the end of July, to **back out** of the deal entirely if **visa liberalization** for Turkish citizens does not happen. The **EU Commission** has also commented that the deal is 'fragile' and at risk of breaking down.

As of July 28, 2016 UNHCR reports that **468 people** have been returned to Turkey from Greece since the implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement. No returns have taken place since June 16, 2016. This marks a small increase from the May 31, 2016 **reports** that 'just over 400' people had been returned to Turkey, none of whom were Syrian. Of those people returned to Turkey in the last 2 months only 31 were **Syrian** and none had claimed asylum in Greece. There are no specific numbers regarding the other nationalities of the individuals deported but **reports** indicate that citizens of Pakistan, Afghans and Bangladeshis have been among those returned to Turkey.

The number of returns is widely thought to be quite low with only 468, of the 9,000 refugees and other mixed migrants who have arrived on Greek islands since the implementation of the deal on March 20, having been returned to Turkey. As of July 13, 2016 the European Commission reports that 802 Syrians had been resettled to the EU

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from Turkey under the agreement. Media and commentators have described the deal as 'dying,' 'faltering,' and 'sputter[ing]'. The move has, however, been credited with a drastic **reduction** of sea arrivals in Greece.

IOM reported **no deaths** along the Eastern Mediterranean route in June and **7** in July. There were no deaths reported in May.

Syrians at the Border: An estimated **160,000** Syrians remain stranded in makeshift camps in Syria near the Turkish border. Ongoing fighting in Aleppo governorate has pushed thousands of Syrians to **flee** North to the border including **65,000** people fleeing a so-called Islamic State offensive in Azaz in May 2016 alone. Authorities maintain that the border remains open for "**emergency situations**" though reports indicate it has been closed for **17 months**.

On June 30, 2016, Turkey opened the **Cilvegozu** border crossing in the province of Hatay to allow Syrians to return home for the **Eid al Fitr** Islamic festival, which began on July 5. The border remained open until 5:00 PM on July 5 to allow at least **34,000** Syrians to cross into Syria. Those who wanted to return to Turkey were required to do so by **July 8**. Syrians hoping to cross into Turkey for the first time, and those without Turkish registration cards, were not permitted to cross the border during this period.

Refugees in Iraq: The most recent UNHCR statistics show that as of June 30, 2016 there were **249,395** Syrians registered in Iraq marking an increase of 2,056 individuals (0.8%) since the last available figures on May 31, 2016. Syrians make up **0.7%** of the total population of Iraq. Of this group 61% (152,075) live in urban, peri-urban, or rural locations, while 39% (97,320) live in camps in Iraq. **97%** of Syrians in the country were living in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) on June 30, 2016, the same percentage as April and May, 2016. At the end of March 2016, UNHCR indicated that there were **55,700 non-Syrian** refugees in Iraq though their nationalities were not disclosed.

According to UNHCR, **2,261 Syrians** crossed into KR-I at the Peshkhabour border in June of 2016. They were admitted on 15-day entry visas and barred access to asylum. Additionally **9 Syrians** were deported from the Gawilan refugee camp despite UNHCR interventions.



Darashakran Camp - Photo credit: Noe Falk Nielsen

IRAQ

249,395

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Departures: As of June 30, 2016, more than **7,000** Iraqis had fled the escalating violence around the city of Mosul and arrived at the Syrian camp of Al-Hol, 14 km from the Iraqi border. On June 30 more than 5,000 Iraqis were still in the camp while others had used it as a point of transit or returned back to KR-I. In recent months, reports have indicated that some Syrians are leaving Iraq to return to Syria with UNHCR recording the return of **803** people in February 2016.

Iraqi Refugees: Up until the closure of Jordan's borders with Iraq and Syria on **June 21** (see Jordan section) Iraqis were continuing to enter Jordan with UNHCR reporting the registration of **56,690** Iraqis in the country on July 31, 2016. This marks an increase of 2.8% (1,528 individuals) since April 30, 2016.

Additionally, as of June 30, 2016 UNHCR reports the presence of **24,027** Iraqi asylum seekers and refugees in Syria, and **123,584** Iraqi asylum applicants in Turkey. As of September 2015, some **45,000** Iraqi refugees were registered in Iran.

Conflict and Displacement: Ongoing fighting, particularly surrounding Iraqi security force attempts to recapture territory held by the so-called Islamic State has resulted in increasing displacement in Iraq. As of July 28, 2016 UNHCR reports the displacement of **87,000** Iraqis due to fighting in and around the besieged city of **Fallujah**. Additionally, UNHCR reports 37,520 IDPs from the **Mosul** area since March, and 33,180 IDPs from the **Shirqat** area since June. On July 29, ICRC predicted that up 1 million more Iraqis could be forced to flee their homes in the coming weeks and months due to a government offensive to **retake** the city of Mosul from the so called Islamic State. **662** Iraqis were killed by violence, armed conflict and acts of terrorism in Iraq in June 2016. An additional **759** Iraqis were killed in July, bringing the 2-month total to 1,421 deaths.

The total number of IDPs in Iraq has increased during the reporting period by 62,430 individuals (up 1.9%) since May 26, 2016 to the July 22 total of **3,369,252** displaced Iraqis. According to IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix **796,758** individuals have returned to their location of origin as at July 22, 2016, largely in areas geographically distinct from those in which people have been displaced. This marks an increase of 9.7% (70,422) from May 26, 2016. The highest percentage of these returns is to **Salah al-Din** governorate.

Iraqis Travelling to Europe: In June and July, 2016 UNHCR documented the arrival by sea of some **3,474** refugees and other mixed migrants to Greece – **287** of whom were Iraqi (8.26%). The number of Iraqis arriving in July (104) shows a decrease from arrivals in May (162) and June (183), all of which mark a significant decrease from the peak 2016 arrivals of **11,964** Iraqis in January. Thus, July arrivals represent a 99.1% decline in arrivals compared to January 2016. The decline is likely attributable to the implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement on March 20, 2016 (see Turkey section) and the closing of European borders. Iraqis use the same routes as Syrians and other mixed migrants, typically travelling to Turkey and continuing to Greece by sea, or Bulgaria by land. Iraqis comprise **15%** of all sea arrivals in Greece in 2016.

In July, IOM released a report entitled 'Migration Flows from Iraq to Europe: Reasons Behind Migration' (accessible [here](#)). The report is based on research conducted with Iraqis in Europe and returnees to Iraq, between November 2015 and May 2016, and reveals that the main motivators for leaving Iraq were security concerns, lack of social justice, and political/economic instability. European countries were selected as destinations because the route to Europe was perceived to be open (low risks and costs) and welcoming

immigration policies were thought to be present. Respondents also noted the lack of other viable options in the region. Ultimately, most respondents felt that their perceptions of Europe, before arriving, were idealized and that living conditions were poor and asylum processes unpredictable, spurring them to return to Iraq.

Returns: Reports indicate a growing number of Iraqis voluntarily returning to Iraq after travelling to Europe and facing closed borders, unemployment, poor living conditions, disappointment and struggle. As of June 2016 nearly 300 Iraqi refugees had voluntarily returned from Greece, and 'thousands' more had returned from elsewhere in Europe, though no specific numbers were available.

a growing
number of Iraqis [are]
voluntarily
returning
to Iraq after travelling to Europe

ISRAEL/OPT

Please see the [RMMS: Horn of Africa and Yemen – Monthly Summary](#) for more information



Basirma refugee camp in Erbil, KRI, Iraq - Photos by Noe Falk

OTHER REGIONAL NEWS

Deaths at Sea: On June 7, 2016 a 'grim milestone' was met as the UN announced the deaths of more than **10,000** people in the Mediterranean en route to Europe since 2014. These include people who died along the Western, Central, and Eastern Mediterranean Routes. Despite **reports** of large-scale **rescues** off the coasts of Italy and Libya, as of July 31 at least 3,120 people had died in the Mediterranean in 2016.

Arrests in Bulgaria: On July 19 and 20 hundreds of refugees and other mixed migrants were **arrested** by Bulgarian authorities on both Bulgarian territory and while trying to cross into Serbia. The arrests were intended to 'send a signal' that Serbia need not worry about the security of its border with Bulgaria, and that the country faces no new migration pressure in the wake of Turkish 'instability.'

Serbia-Hungary Border: Hundreds of refugees and other mixed migrants, mostly from Afghanistan, were **trapped** on a strip of land between Serbia and Hungary after the latter implemented new immigration measures on July 5, following the forced return of 870 migrants to Serbia.

Pakistan Calls for Aid: On June 23, 2016, **Pakistan** announced its need of the support of the international community for the millions of Afghan refugees currently residing in the country. It warned that without help, the number of Afghans heading to Europe will likely increase.

Smuggling in the Balkans: Since the EU-Turkey Agreement and the closure of Balkan borders, a migrant **smuggling boom** has emerged in the Balkans. With no other routes available, smugglers are transporting an unknown number of refugees and migrants through the Balkan countries to Northern Europe, on routes that had been dormant only a few months prior.

Negative Coping in Greece: Reports in June and July reveal that amid declining conditions for the more than 57,000 refugees and other mixed migrants stranded in Greece, Syrians and other refugees are being forced into prostitution to survive. Refugees Deeply reports that refugee **children** and **men** from Afghanistan and Syria are being forced to sell themselves to make money while waiting for asylum in Greece.

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

NEW RESEARCH, REPORTS OR DOCUMENTS

In late June the **Migration Policy Institute** published an [article](#) detailing the changing conditions and resulting adaptation of migration flows in the Mediterranean since 2008. The piece gives a comprehensive overview of the Central, Eastern, and Western Mediterranean Routes to Europe, including the changing usage and prominence of each route over time.

RMMS has produced a new [briefing paper](#) entitled 'Getting to Europe the 'WhatsApp' Way'. The piece addresses the use of information and communication technologies and social media as integral tools used by migrants en route to Europe. The report focuses on the use of such technologies to facilitate contact with smugglers and brokers, and as a mechanism for safety and rescue.

A recent **UNICEF** [child alert](#) discusses the 'harrowing journey' of the tens of thousands of refugee and migrant children, many unaccompanied, who make the dangerous journey to Europe. The report analyses the risks faced by children on the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Routes to Europe, as well as the challenges upon arrival in the country of destination.

The **International Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC)** has released its [Annual Report](#) for 2015, which focuses on key causes of displacement in 2015, and policy relevant analysis by region.

The **2016 Global Peace Index** (accessible [here](#)) reveals a world that has become "historically less peaceful and more unequal" over the past decade. The report claims that terrorism is at an all time high, battle deaths from conflict are at a 25-year high, and that the number of refugees and internally displaced people has increased dramatically over the past 10 years.

A joint initiative of the **City University London, IOM, and the University of York Centre for Applied Human Rights** has produced the June [briefing note](#) 'Missing Migrants and Managing Dead Bodies in the Mediterranean,' part of the Mediterranean Missing Project which aims to 'offer evidence-based policy recommendations to effectively deal with this humanitarian challenge.'

'Fatal Journeys: Volume 2' is a new global [report](#) from **IOM**, which focuses on the identification and tracing of dead and missing migrants. The report answers the questions of "what happens to those who die? Who are their families and will they ever know what happened" with specific regard to the 5,400 migrants who died or were recorded missing in 2015 and the, at least, 3,400 migrants who have lost their lives in 2016.

The **US Department of State** has released its Trafficking in Persons Report for 2016 (accessible [here](#)). The yearly report details the trafficking narratives of countries around the globe, assigning each a 'tier ranking' related to the respective government's adherence to the Trafficking Victim's Protection Act, while focusing on 'strategies to prevent human trafficking around the globe.'

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

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*To be added to DRC's monthly migration summary mailing list,
please contact Nicole Maine at nicole.maine@drc-mena.org.
Past reports can be accessed at <https://drc.ngo/where-we-work/middle-east-and-north-africa>*