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POLITICAL AND
HUMANITARIAN
RESPONSES TO SYRIAN
DISPLACEMENT

Sarah Deardorff Miller

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Political and Humanitarian Responses to Syrian Displacement

This book examines Syrian displacement since the start of the 2011 conflict. It considers how neighboring refugee-hosting states – namely Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon – have responded to Syrian refugees, as well as how the international humanitarian community has assisted and protected refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Miller examines Syrian displacement as it relates to EU and US policies, and relates Syrian displacement to broader themes and debates on the international refugee regime and humanitarian intervention.

The book argues that displacement is not a mere symptom or byproduct of the conflict in Syria, but a key variable that must be addressed with any peace plan or strategy for ending the conflict and rebuilding Syria. Responses to displacement should therefore not just be thought of in a humanitarian context, but also as a political, security and economic issue.

Drawing on media reports, research briefs, scholarly books and articles, NGO reports and UN research to contextualize and critically analyze the blur of headlines and rhetoric on Syria, the book seeks to shed light on the political and humanitarian responses to displacement. It seeks to inform policymakers, practitioners and scholars about the current Syrian displacement situation, helping to make sense of the complex web of literature on Syrian refugees and IDPs.

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Abbreviations

3RP	Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan
CSR51	1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
DCL	designated cluster lead
DGMM	Directorate General of Migration Management (Turkey)
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOD	Department of Defense
DRC	The Democratic Republic of the Congo
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FY	Fiscal Year
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	internally displaced person
IGO	inter-governmental organization
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGO	international non-governmental organization
IO	international organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LFIP	Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Turkey)
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Syria)
MoU	memorandum of understanding
MSF	Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCTC	National Counterterrorism Center
NGO	non-governmental organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
ORR	Office of Refugee Resettlement

xii *Abbreviations*

PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PRM	Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (US State Department)
RRP	Refugee Response Plan
RSD	refugee status determination
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SHARP	Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan
SRP	Strategic Response Plan
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
US	United States
USCIS	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
USG	United States government
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WoS	Whole of Syria (approach)

1 Introduction

Syrian displacement since 2011 is among the worst in a generation. It has dominated headlines and altered the political and humanitarian landscape across the Middle East, Europe and beyond. It has evoked comments and action from figures like the Pope, rock stars and world leaders alike. And while there are certainly other conflicts and situations of displacement around the world, Syria is proving to be a game changer for how states, humanitarian actors and others respond to displacement.

Since 2011, the world has watched as violence has torn Syria apart, forcing millions to be displaced from their homes. There are some 4.8 million refugees that have fled to neighboring Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, with smaller numbers going to Iraq, Egypt and beyond. Another 6.6 million have been displaced within Syria.¹ They are often the most vulnerable, including the elderly, disabled and sick, and have sought refuge with family and friends, or wherever they can find it.

Syria's displaced continue to face horrific conditions, denials of their human rights and discrimination. They are part of a broader picture of the world's displaced, which is at an all-time high. As of 2015, there were some 65.3 million forcibly displaced in the world, 21.3 million of whom were refugees.² States are increasingly unwilling to accept refugees or other forced migrants, and in some cases are downright hostile to them. At the same time, the majority of the world's displaced are in developing countries that are least able to assist or protect them.

In some ways, Syrian displacement has followed a common path of other refugee crises. Millions have sought shelter in neighboring countries; international actors and host states have responded with traditional approaches of camps, settlements and aid; and the world has offered sympathy and some funding, but few solutions. Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) continue to suffer greatly, international norms are violated, and political solutions remain elusive.

2 Introduction

However, Syrian displacement may also prove to be a turning point in how the world responds to refugees and other groups of forced migrants. Scholars, advocates, policymakers and practitioners are rethinking the global refugee regime; even President Obama has called for a refugee-focused summit alongside the United Nations General Assembly in September 2016. The world is watching more closely, particularly as media coverage is filled with headlines of European Union (EU) states struggling to receive refugees. States like Germany and Canada have taken a stand because the situation has changed since the time of writing. . . Germany in particular is not as open as it was before. Syria – unlike other conflict-ridden states that are too often ignored – has become central to powerful states’ interests. Indeed, the conflict in Syria and concerns about terrorism and broader Middle Eastern instability are central concerns to US and EU strategy. While it may not be right that other conflicts are ignored for lack of strategic interest, Syrian violence and displacement continue to preoccupy a large part of powerful states’ foreign policy priorities.

Syrian displacement has engaged new actors, and a broader portion of the public has opinions about and knowledge of the suffering of Syria’s displaced in ways that have not happened with other refugee situations. Social media has meant that millions around the world were moved by disturbing photos, such as that of toddler Aylan Kurdi’s body washed up on a Turkish beach – a photo that helped mobilize Canada, for example, to resettle even more Syrian refugees. Moreover, creative thinking and innovations have taken place during the Syrian displacement situation. Local development zones are being implemented in Jordan, for example, as ways to stimulate the local economy, benefit business and give refugees work and dignity to support their families. New technology, such as iris scanners that replace ATM cards for refugees to receive case assistance have, in some instances, replaced old ration card methods. Humanitarian actors have also responded *en masse*, which has produced the usual coordination challenges, but has also brought about new methods of cooperation, including shared databases, portals and new mechanisms.

Syria is also causing academics and policy researchers to step back and reevaluate the broader global refugee regime. New summits, conferences and papers are more focused on how to adapt a regime that grew out of the post–World War II era’s attempts to respond to refugees in Europe to today’s context. How well does the system in place “fit” what the world is experiencing today? Responses to Syrian displacement seem to be testing, if not violating, any number of international norms, including notions of responsibility-sharing and cooperation, the concept of *non-refoulement*, the politicization and militarization of aid, the responsibility to protect, and other human rights concepts and norms. Academics, practitioners and

policymakers alike are thus stepping back and reevaluating how to make these norms more effective.

Syria is certainly not the only case demonstrating these refugee/IDP-related issues – all of which relate to broader political, economic, security and social issues. Indeed, many other situations of displacement are deserving of greater attention and have demonstrated extremes as well. Nevertheless, the crisis of Syrian displacement may well prove to be a turning point in how members of the world – states, humanitarians and refugees themselves – think about and respond to displacement.

This book aims to be a resource on Syrian displacement. It is applicable to scholars, policymakers, civil society, practitioners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the general public, and it provides both overview information and analysis on Syrian displacement. While it does not take a theoretical stance as many strictly academic works do in their respective fields, it does link the information to broader questions about the international refugee regime and humanitarianism. More importantly, it demonstrates why Syrian displacement is relevant to other issue areas, such as peace and security, and thus deserving of a renewed drive on the part of policymakers to find solutions.

This introductory chapter situates this book amongst other works on Syrian displacement and provides a brief overview of the conflict in Syria. It also lays out the scale and scope of displacement and provides some additional context and a timeline. It then lays out the trajectory of the chapters.

Situating this book amidst other works on Syrian displacement

There has been a proliferation of academics, governments and organizations researching Syrian displacement, and there are a number of excellent resources already available. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has an information sharing portal – the “Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal” – which hosts thousands of reports, financial information, maps and data on Syrian displacement. It is a massive resource that demonstrates improvements in humanitarian coordination during the Syrian displacement situation. ALNAP’s Syria Evaluation Portal for Coordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning (CALL) also provides an extensive culmination of resources and themes pertaining to humanitarian work on Syria.

Amidst the sea of NGO reports, UN reports, media articles, blogs and policy briefs, there are few books that offer more comprehensive analyses. Elizabeth Ferris and Kemal Kirişçi’s recent book on Syrian displacement, *The Consequences of Chaos: Syria’s Humanitarian Crisis and the Failure*