

**DRC DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL**

CLOSING BORDERS, SHIFTING ROUTES:
**SUMMARY OF REGIONAL
MIGRATION TRENDS**

MIDDLE EAST

MAY - 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: *A family moving to a better place in the Bajet Kandala camp after heavy rain
Photos from Kurdish Region Iraq | Photo by Klaus Bo Christensen*



SYRIA

Syrian Refugees: As the conflict in Syria reaches its sixth year, ongoing fighting continues to displace thousands of Syrians both within and outside of the country. As of May 31, 2016 UNHCR had registered a total **4,838,620** Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and North Africa since the conflict began. In the last month alone, 1,982 new individuals were registered (up 0.04%) since April 30, 2016. By mid-May the total figure had grown by 7,473 from April 30, 2016 to reach **4,844,111** individuals before dropping to the final end of May total. Of the total UNHCR registered Syrian refugees, **4,346,428** (90%) live in urban, peri-urban, or rural areas, while only 492,192 (10%) live in formal. The majority are hosted by Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

As of May 31,
2016 UNHCR had
registered a total

4,838,620

Conflict and Displacement: By the end of May, 2016 an estimated **6.5 million** people were internally displaced within Syria. The **majority** are in the rural Damascus and Aleppo governorates. The February 27 Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) continued to **breakdown** in April and May with frequent reports of fighting including **airstrikes** on Syrian refugee camps and attacks on **hospitals**.

an estimated
6.5 MILLION
people are internally
displaced

In the last week of May, more than **45,000** Syrians fled to the area between the Bab Al Salam border crossing with Turkey and the town of Azaz in Aleppo (known as the Azaz corridor). This was due to a large-scale **offensive** in Northern Aleppo by the so-called Islamic State. An additional **8,000** people fled to this area at the end of May due to a Syrian army offensive in Ar-Raqqa governorate, bringing the total number of people stranded at the border to more than **165,000**. Since early May the advancement of government forces has caused the displacement of a further **13,600** Syrians in Eastern Ghouta, rural Damascus in addition to 45,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) reported in Al Hasakeh governorate since February, 2016.

As of January 2016, there were an estimated **450,000** Palestinian refugees in Syria, 280,000 of whom have been internally displaced. Since December 2015, figures show 39,500 Iraqi refugees residing within Syria.

Closing Borders: Despite nearly 5 million Syrians fleeing their country since the beginning of the conflict, the **borders** surrounding Syria are becoming **increasingly** closed. 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**, limited admissions at the **Jordanian** border and visa requirements for entry to **Turkey** by sea or air.

the borders surrounding
Syria are increasingly
closed

By the end of May, 2016, an estimated **165,000** people were stranded in Syria along the Turkish border. The border has remained closed for the past **15 months**, with some medical exceptions (see Turkey section). This marks an increase of roughly 65,000 people since **April 30**, 2016. Between May 24 and 27 alone, approximately **45,000** people arrived at the border after fleeing advances by the so-called Islamic State in Azaz. There are also an estimated **72,000** displaced Syrians stranded between the two berms at Syria's southern border with Jordan (see Jordan section). If the conflict in Syria continues, the number of those stranded at the Jordanian border is expected to reach **100,000** by the end of 2016.

An estimated
165,000 people
were stranded in Syria

...1,721 boat arrivals in Greece...

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 April 2016, these closures effectively left close to [54,000](#) refugees and mixed migrants, including thousands of Syrians, stranded in Greece.

Eastern Mediterranean Route: In May 2016, UNHCR reported [1,721](#) boat arrivals in Greece – a 53% decrease from April, 2016 figures (which were already an 86% decrease from March 2016). Of the recorded May arrivals, [637](#) were Syrian (half the April figure), 258 Afghan, 224 Pakistani, 155 Iraqi, and 120 Algerian. The average daily arrivals in May were [56](#) individuals a day, less than half of the 122 person daily average in April. IOM reported [no deaths](#) along the Eastern Mediterranean route in May, 2016, as compared to 10 deaths reported in April. According to [FRONTEX](#) 77,735 Syrians have arrived in Greece along the Eastern Mediterranean route in the first 5 months of 2016.

EU-Turkey Agreement: On [March 18, 2016](#) the European Union and Turkey made a controversial deal intended to stop the flow of refugees and other mixed migrants into Europe. Under the agreement, Turkey was reclassified as a ‘safe country’ meaning all ‘irregular migrants’ arriving in Greece after midnight on March 20, 2016 would be deported to Turkey. The agreement came in exchange for [\\$6.8 billion](#) in refugee-related aid to Turkey, visa free travel for Turkish citizens in Europe’s Schengen zone by June, and a ‘speeding-up’ of talks concerning Ankara’s accession to the EU. The deal also means that for every Syrian deported from Greece to Turkey, the EU will [resettle](#) one Syrian living in a Turkish refugee camp. The agreement came into force on March 20 and has been met with significant backlash concerning the [legality](#) of the agreement and the extent to which [Turkey](#) qualifies as a [safe third country](#). These concerns were fuelled by [reports](#) of the forcible return of Afghan asylum seekers to Afghanistan hours after the EU-Turkey deal came into force.

Only 10 weeks after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement, media and commentators are describing a ‘[dying](#),’ ‘[faltering](#),’ and ‘[sputter\[ing\]](#)’ deal. Though forced deportations by boat from Greece to Turkey began on [April 4](#), as of May 31, 2016 just over [400](#) people had been returned from Greece to Turkey, none of them Syrian. However, [some](#) Syrians returned [voluntarily](#). There are no specific numbers regarding the nationalities of the individuals deported but [reports](#) indicate that Pakistanis, Afghans and Bangladeshis were among those returned to Turkey. The move has, however, been credited with a drastic [reduction](#) of sea arrivals in Greece.

The agreement was dealt a blow on May 20, 2016 when a three person [appeals tribunal](#) in Lesbos ruled against sending a Syrian man back to Turkey. The appeal applicant was one of the first Syrians listed for deportation under the agreement, but the appeals committee ruled that the rights entitled to the applicant, under the Geneva convention, would not be upheld in Turkey. [Amnesty International](#) lauded this decision, saying that “*Turkey is not safe for refugees.*” The [Greek government](#) stated that the decision had created “*a very difficult situation.*”

Despite the fact that no Syrians have been involuntarily returned from Greece to Turkey, as of May 18, 2016, [177 Syrians](#) have been resettled in EU countries - namely Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Lithuania. The European Commission indicated that 723 Syrians are currently awaiting transfer.

Other Routes to Europe: For the second consecutive month, more people arrived by sea to Italy ([19,925](#) individuals) than to Greece ([1,721](#) individuals). This [does not](#), however, mark a significant shift by Syrians to the [Central Mediterranean](#) route to Europe. Despite the greater number of arrivals in Italy, [FRONTEX](#) claims that this is not related to shifting routes used by refugees and other mixed migrants stranded in Turkey. [Arrivals](#) in Italy are primarily from Eritrea, Nigeria, Gambia, Somalia, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sudan, Mali, and Senegal, with no notable increase in Syrian arrivals.

Despite the closure of the Balkan route to Europe and [fears](#) that the EU-Turkey Agreement will significantly shift migration routes to the Bulgarian border, [Bulgarian officials](#) reported that the number of refugees and other mixed migrants entering Bulgaria from Turkey has dropped. In the first quarter of 2016, Bulgarian officials detected roughly 2,800 irregular crossings at the Turkish border, a 20% decrease from the 3,500 detected during the same period in 2015. The estimated daily average for arrivals varies, with border monitoring groups reporting only [50](#) refugees and other mixed migrant arrivals per day while the ICRC indicates that nearly 200 are arrested on a daily basis.

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 Pakistanis. People typically cross this densely forested border on foot or via official checkpoints, hiding in vehicles or buses. While the land border crossing removes the risks of travel by sea, there are other associated dangers with instances of [push-backs](#) and [violence](#) reportedly occurring at the border.

Alternative Destinations: For a growing number of Syrians, leaving the Middle East does not mean travelling to Europe. A recent series of [IRIN](#) reports highlight 'Syrians in unexpected places' like [Mauritania](#), [Sudan](#), [Brazil](#), and [Mali](#). These countries either offer humanitarian visas or no visa requirements at all. Additionally, some Syrians are using Brazil, Mali, and Mauritania as alternative routes to Europe.

Trafficking: [Refugees Deeply](#) has published an article detailing the trafficking risks faced by Syrian women en route to Europe. The piece details the connection between trafficking rings and organized gangs that help smuggle people into European countries.

Additionally, the [sex trafficking](#) of Syrian women is an ongoing and growing concern in Lebanon as highlighted by the dismantling of the country's largest known [sex trafficking ring](#) in March 2016 (see Lebanon section).

...more people arrived by sea to Italy (**19,925** individuals) than to Greece (**1,721** individuals) ...



JORDAN

Arrivals: As of May 31, 2016 UNHCR had registered **655,062** Syrians in Jordan. This marks an increase of 12,194 individuals (up 1.9%) since the last recorded figures on **April 19**, 2016. Of this group, 79.1% (518,024 individuals) live in urban, peri-urban or rural areas (an increase of 1,051 individuals since April 19) and 20.9% (137,038 individuals) live in camps (an increase of 11,143 individuals from April 19). Jordanian leadership refutes UNHCR's figure with estimates in April that roughly **1.3 million** Syrians are residing in the country.

...registered
655,062
 Syrians in Jordad

According to IRIN the number of Syrians crossing the Jordanian border reached a peak in mid-May with **400 to 500** people crossing each day. In March, 2016 Jordanian authorities began permitting roughly **200 to 300** Syrians to enter the country on a **daily** basis. These admissions occur primarily through Jordan's North-Eastern border with Syria at Hadalat and Rukban where thousands of Syrians are stranded on a berm outside the border (see 'Syrians at the Border' section below). As of May 31, UNHCR had recorded the arrival of **26,673** Syrians in Jordan in 2016.

On **May 21**, 2016 Iraqi authorities announced that the closed Turaibil border between Jordan and Iraq is expected to be opened within two weeks. According to Refugees Deeply, the **reopening** of this border could allow for the return of thousands of people who fled Iraq when Anbar province was taken by the so-called Islamic state in 2014. The most recent UNHCR figures indicate that **55,162** Iraqis were registered in Jordan by April 30, 2016. This shows an increase of 172 individuals (up 0.3%) since previously recorded numbers on April 15. Jordan's most recent Population Census puts the figure much higher, indicating that **130,911** Iraqis were living in Jordan by the end of 2015.

The number of Yemenis in Jordan was most recently recorded by UNHCR at **4,071** individuals on April 30, 2016, marking an increase of 219 people (up 5.7%) since March 31. Jordan's Population Census shows a different story, indicating that there were **31,163** Yemenis living in the country by the end of 2015. 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.

Finally, in the most recently available figures from **April 30**, 2016 UNHCR had registered 3,055 Sudanese (a 22 person increase from March 31) and 777 Somalis (a 3 person increase) in Jordan.

Departures: **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. There are no specific figures regarding returns in May. Among other reasons, Syrians have been **motivated** to return by the deteriorating quality of asylum in Jordan and the lack of livelihood opportunities.

Thousands of people remain stranded in the demilitarised zone at Jordan's North-Eastern border with Syria.

Syrians at the Border: Thousands of people remain stranded in the [demilitarised zone](#) at Jordan's North-Eastern border with Syria. The unmarked [border](#) runs between two [berms](#), making it [unclear](#) whether the reported [64,000](#) to [72,000](#) individuals stranded near the crossing points of Rukban and Hadalat are on Syrian or Jordanian territory. These numbers, recorded at the end of May, 2016 mark an increase from the highest predictions of [56,000](#) people stranded at the berm at the end of April, 2016. These numbers remain estimates due to the [inability](#) of aid agencies, journalists, and the Jordanian military to enter the demilitarised zone. On May 5, 2015 Jordanian border guards reported at least [59,000](#) people at Rukban and 5,000 at Hadalat, while as of May 31 UNHCR had registered only [36,993](#) people at the berm (26,213 at Rukban and 10,789 at Hadalat). The stranded population is expected to reach [100,000](#) by the end of 2016 if the conflict in Syria continues. In late April, satellite imagery was used to identify at least [6,104](#) shelters at the border.

A reportedly arid, desert environment, diplomats have described [conditions](#) at the berm as 'horrendous' for the thousands of Syrians who have waited at the border for months. [Reports](#) indicate that riots broke out near the Rukban border in early May as people waited to register claims with UNHCR. Limited [humanitarian access](#), reports of [deaths](#), [violence](#), [riots](#), inadequate medical services, [extreme weather conditions](#), and the diversion of humanitarian assistance have together left these settlements extremely vulnerable. Syrians are often transported to the berm by smugglers leading them on a [journey](#) of up to 21 days over rough roads and through government held territory, often with limited food and water. The [Middle East Eye](#) reports that some Syrians have come to the demilitarised zone for safety and services but do not intend to cross the border to Jordan.

During May, daily admissions at the border increased from roughly [200-250](#) individuals per day in April to a peak of [400-500](#). Jordanian [authorities](#) prescribe a holistic approach to mitigating the suffering of refugees, but maintain that [rigorous inspections](#) at the border are in place to ensure [Jordanian security](#). Jordanian government officials have likened this process to the security screening procedures of European countries. 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.

...approximately 12,700 Syrians were living in Village 5...

In late March 2016, Jordanian authorities agreed to admit more Syrians into the country on a daily basis, roughly 300 per day) on the condition that new arrivals would be sent directly to '[Village 5](#)' in the Azraq refugee camp for further security checks. According to [IRIN](#), as of May 27 approximately 12,700 Syrians were living in Village 5 and were 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](#).



LEBANON

1 in every 5 people in Lebanon is a Syrian refugee.

1,048,275

Syrian refugees were registered in Lebanon

Roughly **53%** of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in 12 recognized camps.

Refugees in Lebanon: According to [WFP](#) figures, 1 in every 5 people in Lebanon is a Syrian refugee. While data is not available for May 2016, UNHCR's most recent figures indicate that **1,048,275** Syrian refugees were registered in Lebanon by March 31, 2016. However the government of Lebanon claims that the number is closer to **1.5 million**. If correct, this would make 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 **18%** 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**.

[OCHA](#) reports that in May, 2016 there were 277,985 Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRL) 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.

Additionally, as of April 2016, OCHA estimates that **35,000** Lebanese citizens who had been residing in Syria, have returned to Lebanon since the beginning of the conflict. IOM and the Lebanese High Relief Commission have registered only **28,574** of these individuals. Described by IOM as 'Lebanese **returnees**', these Lebanese citizens had lived in Syria prior to the crisis and have recognised legal status in Lebanon though they remain among the most **vulnerable** populations due to their often limited social support networks.

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. Despite **deteriorating** asylum **conditions** in Lebanon, a recent [Aljazeera](#) article indicates that many Syrians have no interest in leaving the country for Europe, as they want to be near Syria and return once it is possible.

IOM reports indicate that between January 1 and March 31 of this year, **309 Lebanese citizens** arrived by sea in Greece after departing from Turkey. This figure has **not** been updated in May.

Trafficking: **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. 75 trafficked Syrian women were freed, many of whom had faced violence and been held captive for **years** after being tricked into coming to Lebanon. This is the latest Lebanese **crackdown** on human trafficking rings in the country, with no new reports available in May.



TURKEY

2,743,497

Syrians registered in Turkey

strict **VISA
REQUIRE-
MENTS**

for Syrians entering..

Arrivals: By the end of May 2016, UNHCR's figures indicate 2,743,497 Syrians registered in Turkey. This marks a decrease of 5,643 individuals (down 0.2%) from prior figures in April, 2016 and follows a peak of 2,749,862 registered Syrians in Turkey earlier in the month on May 2, 2016.

January figures indicate more than 200,000 Iraqi refugees in Turkey, in addition to smaller Afghan and Iranian populations.

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. 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.

Departures to Europe: The Turkish Coast Guard reported 28 'irregular migration' cases or incidents in the seas surrounding Turkey, in May 2016 involving 1,109 'irregular migrants,' 608 less individuals than the April, 2016 total. The Coast Guard also reported the apprehension of 2 'organisers' of irregular migration. UNHCR reported 1,721 sea-arrivals in May in Greece (almost exclusively from Turkey) a 53% decrease from April, 2016 figures (which were already an 86% decrease from March 2016). Of the recorded May arrivals 637 were Syrian (half the April figure), 258 Afghan, 224 Pakistani, 155 Iraqi, and 120 Algerian. The average daily arrivals in May were 56 individuals a day, less than half of the 122 person daily average in April.

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.

According to Bulgarian officials, the number of refugees and other mixed migrants crossing the Bulgarian border from Turkey has also dropped despite the closure of the Balkan route to Europe and the implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement. In May the average of only 50 refugees and other mixed migrants arrived in Bulgaria each day, though ICRC estimates that 200 people are arrested at the border daily. In the first quarter of 2016 Bulgarian officials detected roughly 2,800 irregular crossings at the Turkish border, a 20% decrease from the 3,500 detected during the same period in 2015. Bulgarian officials attribute the dropping numbers to increased Turkish policing at the border. As at March 31, 2016 Iraqis were the largest group apprehended by Bulgarian authorities at the border followed by Syrians, Afghans, and Pakistanis.

According to UNHCR between May 2 and 8, a reported 272 refugees and other mixed migrants were apprehended, intercepted, or rescued off Turkey's shores. 255 were apprehended at the land borders, primarily of Afghan, Pakistani, Syrian, and Uzbek descent.

Afghan refugees are a key group among those leaving Turkey for Greece with a reported 258 arriving in Greece by sea in May 2016. This figure is 55.5% less than the 580

recorded by UNHCR in April 2016 (already a 90% drop from March figures). In the early months of 2016, [Afghans](#) entered Turkey through Iran en route to Europe via Greece and Bulgaria (see 'Other Regional News' section).

EU-Turkey Agreement: Increasingly described as 'shaky' and 'crumbling' the EU-Turkey Agreement has been connected to the significant [decline](#) in Greek arrivals by sea during April and May, 2016 while at the same time resulting in [fewer](#) deportations to Turkey and resettlement to the EU than expected. As of May 31, 2016 just over [400](#) people had been returned from Greece to Turkey, none of them Syrian. Though, there are no specific numbers regarding the nationalities of the individuals deported, [reports](#) indicate that Pakistanis, Afghans, and Bangladeshis were among those returned to Turkey, in addition to [some](#) Syrians who returned [voluntarily](#).

over **400** people had been returned from Greece to Turkey, none of them Syrian.

Though no Syrians have been involuntarily returned from Greece to Turkey, reports indicate that as of May 18, 2016, [177 Syrians](#) had been resettled in the EU countries of Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Lithuania. The European Commission indicated that 723 Syrians are currently awaiting transfer. Turkey and the EU have hailed the agreement as a [success](#), citing the decreased number of refugees and other mixed migrants arriving in Europe and claiming to have broken the business model of smugglers. [Greece's](#) Prime Minister has also defended the agreement against controversy, by noting the decreasing flows of refugees and other mixed migrants to Greece.

On May 20, 2016 a three person [appeals tribunal](#) in Lesbos, Greece ruled against sending a Syrian man back to Turkey. [Amnesty International](#) applauded the decision, while [Greek authorities](#) worried about the confusion this would create for the EU-Turkey agreement. The appeal applicant was one of the first Syrians listed for deportation under the agreement, but the appeals committee ruled that the rights entitled to the applicant, under the Geneva convention, would not be upheld in Turkey.

Bulgaria Readmission Agreement: In early May, 2016 Bulgaria and Turkey signed a [deal](#) under which Bulgaria will [return](#) to Turkey any "illegal migrants" who have entered Bulgaria through Turkey after June 1, 2016.

Turkish border guards have killed at least five Syrian refugees

Refugee and Migrant Vulnerability: A new [Human Rights Watch](#) report claims that Turkish border guards have killed at least five Syrian refugees attempting to cross the border and [injured](#) at least 14 others via the use of ‘excessive force.’ The [Turkish government](#) maintains that the claims “do not reflect the reality.” This comes after the accusation in April that border guards shot and killed [8 Syrians](#) trying to reach safety in Turkey. The claims are based on mobile phone footage from [The Times](#) depicting survivors of the incident [fleeing](#) down a mountain path, as well as a lawyer’s description of the incident as he witnessed it. Turkish authorities have [denied](#) the claims.

In March, reports indicated that [16 Syrians](#) had been killed by Turkish border guards as they tried to cross into Turkey in recent months. Amnesty International claims that Syrian refugees are being [shot at](#) at the Turkish border on a daily basis. Syrians have also described [beatings](#) at the border, with others recounting experiences of being detained or expelled.

IOM reported [no deaths](#) at sea along the Eastern Mediterranean route in May 2016, a decrease from the 10 deaths reported in April. Despite this, Greek authorities still [rescued](#) 65 people at sea off the island of Crete on May 27th, and 112 people in the same area on May 31.

Syrians at the Border: As of May 31, 2016 an estimated [165,000](#) people were stranded in Syria near the border with Turkey. A so-called Islamic State offensive in Azaz forced approximately [45,000](#) people to flee to the border between May 24 and 27 alone, contributing to an increase in roughly [65,000](#) IDPs in the Azaz corridor between the town of Azaz and the Bab Al Salam border crossing with Turkey, since April 30, 2016. Authorities maintain that the border remains open for “[emergency situations](#)” though reports indicate it has been closed for [15 months](#). Turkish officials claimed 10,000 people had been allowed to cross the border but Amnesty International has [contested](#) this claim.

an estimated
165,000 people
were stranded in Syria near
the border with Turkey



IRAQ

... registered
247,339 Syrians
 in Iraq...

... more than **4,000**
 Iraqis have fled the city of
 Mosul and entered Syria

Refugees in Iraq: As of May 31, 2016 UNHCR had registered **247,339** Syrians in Iraq marking an increase of 750 individuals (up 0.3%) since April 30, 2016. Of this group 61% (150,266) live in urban, peri-urban, or rural locations, while 39% (97,073) live in camps in Iraq. **97%** of Syrians in the country were living in the Kurdistan Region - Iraq (KR-I) on May 30, 2016, the same percentage as April, 2016. By the end of March, 2016, UNHCR indicated that there were **55,700 non-Syrian** refugees in Iraq though their nationalities were not disclosed.

Departures: Since the beginning of May, 2016 more than **4,000** Iraqis have fled the city of Mosul and entered Syria. In the month of May the UNHCR recorded the arrival of 4,266 Iraqi refugees at the **Al-Hol** camp 14km from Iraq's border with Syria. According to UNHCR the influx is likely due to anticipated conflict arising from military operations in **Fallujah** since May 22, 2016.

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 continue to enter neighbouring Jordan with **55,162** registered by UNHCR as of April 30, 2016. This marks an increase of 0.3% (172 people since the previously recorded numbers on April 15). Figures from Jordan's December 2015 Population Census put the figure much higher, indicating that **130,911** Iraqis were living in Jordan at the end of 2015. Iraqi authorities have indicated that the long-closed **Turaibil** border between Iraq and Jordan is expected to reopen within two weeks of the announcement date on May 21, 2016. Refugees Deeply predicts that the **reopening** of this border will allow for the return of thousands of Iraqis to Anbar province.

The most recent UNHCR figures, from June 2015, estimate that roughly **180,000** Iraqi refugees are living in neighbouring countries like Turkey and Jordan.

Conflict and Displacement: May 22, 2016 marked the commencement of military operations by the Iraqi security forces to retake the city of **Fallujah** from the so-called Islamic State. By the end of May, fighting in the city had already forced a reported **3,700** people to flee to the KR-I capital of Erbil, though thousands more are expected. At the end of May some **50,000** civilians remained trapped in the besieged city, lacking in food, water, medicine, and electricity, prompting the **Norwegian Refugee Council's** secretary general, Jan Egeland, to describe the situation as "a human catastrophe... unfolding."

Military operations in Anbar province have displaced at least **60,000** since March, 2016. A total of **867** Iraqis were killed by violence, armed conflict, and acts of terrorism in Iraq in May, 468 of whom were civilians.

Despite these new internal displacements, the total number of IDPs in Iraq has decreased by 26,562 (down 0.8%) since April 28, 2016 to the May 26 total of **3,306,822** individuals. This is due to an 11% increase in returnees (69,558 people), as recorded by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, indicating that **726,336** individuals have returned to their location of origin in Iraq in May. The highest percentage of these returns is to **Salah al-Din** governorate, followed by Ninewa and Diyala primarily due to improved

security conditions in these areas. [46%](#) of the total IDP population in Iraq were hosted in Baghdad, Anbar, and Dahuk governorates on May 26, 2016, with the largest number hosted in Anbar.

Returns: In March, reports indicated a growing number of Iraqis [voluntarily returning](#) to Iraq after travelling to Europe and facing [unemployment](#), [disappointment](#) and struggle. There are no updated figures or information regarding voluntary returns in May.

Iraqis Travelling to Europe: In May 2016, UNHCR documented the arrival by sea of some [1,721](#) refugees and other mixed migrants to Greece-155 of whom are Iraqi (9.0%). In April 2016, 381 Iraqis arrived by sea in Greece, making up [10.4%](#) of the total arrivals in April. Thus the actual number of Iraqis arriving in Greece has dropped by 59% between April and May 2016, part of a decline likely attributable to the implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement on March 20, 2016 (see Turkey section). 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.

Rescue at Sea: On [May 27](#), 2016 the Greek Coast Guard responded to a distress call from a boat carrying 64 people off the South Coast of Crete. The responders were able to transfer the passengers to land, the majority of whom were Iraqi (28 individuals), among others from Afghanistan, Iran, Syria and Pakistan. Passengers reported paying smugglers between 5,000 and 7,500 USD for their passage via Istanbul to Italy. They described a dangerous journey in rough weather and expressed their disappointment upon arriving in Greece and not Italy. At least one passenger was motivated by deteriorating security conditions in Iraq and the desire to reunite with family who had already made the journey to Europe.

ISRAEL/OPT

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



OTHER REGIONAL NEWS

World Humanitarian Summit: On May 23 to 24, 2016 the first [World Humanitarian Summit](#) was held in Istanbul. The event brought together heads of state, private sector representatives, civil society, and NGOs from 173 member states. The summit resulted in 1,500 commitments the foremost of which is the '[Grand Bargain Agreement](#)'. The Agreement is a package of reforms for humanitarian funding characterised by 51 key commitments and an annual saving of 1 billion USD after 5 years. The agreement was [signed](#) by the top 30 donors and aid agencies. Not all large humanitarian actors were present, or aligned, with the aims of the Summit. In early May, [MSF](#) announced that it would not attend due to a lack of faith in the ability of the summit to “address the weaknesses in humanitarian action.”

Closing Idomeni: On May 23, 2016 Greek police began transferring refugees and other mixed migrants from the country's largest makeshift refugee camp at [Idomeni](#). An estimated [8,400](#) people have been staying at the camp on the border with Macedonia (FYROM) since the closure of the Balkan route to Europe in March. 3,000 people were transferred from Idomeni to a network of more permanent camps in Greece, though they have been [described](#) as “*not fit for animals*” due to their filthy conditions and lack of running water. While 3,000 people were transferred to the new camps this leaves at least 4,000 refugees and other mixed migrants unaccounted for. They are thought to be living on the streets in Greek cities, hiding in forests near the border, or already departed north to Europe via smugglers.

Afghan Displacement: [Amnesty International](#) reports that at the end of May, 2016 an estimated 1.2 million people were internally displaced in Afghanistan. Ongoing conflict has led to the displacement of an estimated [118,000](#) people in the first four months of 2016 with an average of 1,000 Afghans fleeing their homes each day. [Amnesty International](#) reports that the country has failed to live up to its 2014 pledge to provide access to basic living standards for IDPs in the country as conditions continue to deteriorate. The deteriorating security and living conditions in Afghanistan is also prompting thousands of people to [leave](#). This is demonstrated by recent reports which show that Afghans are the [second largest](#) group claiming asylum in Europe, and that nearly half of all unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Europe since 2008 are [Afghan](#).

Deaths at Sea: Though there were no reported deaths on the Eastern Mediterranean route to Europe in May, 2016 IOM recorded [1,130](#) fatalities on the Central Mediterranean Route and 8 on the Western Mediterranean Route over the same period bringing the total for 2016 to at least [2,510](#). In the last week of May shipwrecks off the Libyan and Italian coasts killed at least [880](#) people, while [13,000](#) people were rescued in the same week.

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

NEW RESEARCH, REPORTS OR DOCUMENTS

According to a new [global survey](#) commissioned by **Amnesty International**, 80% of people worldwide would welcome refugees into their country, community or home. Among these China, Germany, and the UK were reported to be the most welcoming, while Russia was the least. According to Amnesty International, the [survey](#) of more than 27,000 people shows that government refugee policies are 'out of touch' with public opinion.

The **New Yorker** has produced a six-part documentary series (accessible [here](#)) documenting the journeys of various individuals and groups as they travel from Syria to Europe.

EUROPOL and **INTERPOL** released the findings of a joint [review](#) of migrant smuggling networks bringing people to the EU. The report notes the fluidity of key migratory routes, the criminality and profitability of smuggling, and that more than 90% of arrivals in the EU are facilitated by criminal networks.

In May, **Refugees Deeply** concluded a three-part [series](#) concerning the 'cycles of violence' experienced by refugee women, particularly from Syria, while en route to Europe. The [first](#) instalment explores the risk of trafficking faced by women on the move, the [second](#) explores gender-based violence against urban refugees struggling to find shelter and livelihoods, and the [third](#) covers the challenges of identifying violence, abuse and exploitation of women on the move.

New research from the **Max Planck Institute for Chemistry** indicates that climate change and concomitant rising temperatures may render parts of the MENA region uninhabitable by 2100. Though climate change affects all parts of the globe, these findings show that fatally high summer temperatures will be of particular concern in the MENA region.

In May, **IOM** released its [2015 version](#) of The Middle East and North Africa: Annual Report. The report highlights IOM programming, as well as focusing on movement in and between the MENA region and the Mediterranean. Policy development, resettlement, migrant rights, protection and development are all key topics highlighted by the report.

A **Washington Post** [article](#), published on May 14, argues that 'the real refugee crisis' is not in Europe, but rather in the Middle East. The piece details the growing crisis in Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt who are host states for thousands, if not millions, of displaced Syrians.

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

DRC DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL

*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>*