

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)  
Emerging and Crisis Related Issues (ECRI) Section**

**REPORT**

**Of the brainstorming session on the impact of conflict-driven  
displacement in the ESCWA region**

**Beirut, Lebanon, 9 February 2009**

**Summary**

A brainstorming session on the impact of conflict-driven displacement in the ESCWA region was held at UN House, Beirut on 9 February 2009. The session was organized by the Section for Emerging and Conflict Related Issues (ECRI). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and solicit input and comments on a draft Study on the Socio-economic Impact of Displacement in the ESCWA Region. The meeting was designed to provide a platform for discussion amongst UN agencies, think tanks and academic institutions on the challenges and solutions faced by both displaced populations and host countries in this region, with the objective to development clear policy recommendations for ESCWA member states and others. The second objective of the session was to brainstorm on various avenues for future collaboration between ESCWA/ECRI and UN agencies on follow-up studies and activities related to regional responses to the problem of displacement.

As a basis and structure for the session's discussions, ECRI prepared a presentation of its study on the impact of conflict-driven displacement in the ESCWA region, which provided an overview of the main issues relating to conflict-driven displacement, its impact on the populations and on the host countries.

Discussions focused on: (a) Characteristics of displacement; (b) Causes and trends; (c) Durable solutions; (d) Impact on displaced populations and host countries; (e) Regional responses and policy recommendations and ways to deliver them to member states and (f) Issues and topics for further research and potential collaboration with UN agencies and other relevant institutions.

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## Introduction

1. The ESCWA region is a rapidly changing environment. Most – if not all – sources of conflict and political instability in the Middle East are inter-related where socio-economic issues overlap with political, security and strategic matters. Not only are all these issues cross-cutting, but they are also not confined to specific borders or a particular geographic area. Against this backdrop, the region is unfortunately likely to continue to suffer from conflict, political tensions and its ramifications. The impact of these ramifications is usually immediate, but also often long-lasting, stretching over long periods of time. This does not only include the social, economic and political repercussions of conflict but also negative trends such as the rise of non-state actors, ethnic and sectarian tensions, rise of religious extremism and displacement. Such growing phenomena may last for decades and are difficult to reverse.
2. The Emerging and Conflict Related Issues (ECRI) section was created to better place ESCWA to address conflict related issues, to analyze their regional impact and to derive policy recommendations. ECRI is also active in tackling the issue of how to assist ESCWA member states to achieve their development goals in spite of conflict or instability.
3. More than 42 million people in the world are currently displaced by conflict. Of these, 16 million are refugees and more than 26 million have been displaced inside their own countries. Displacement due to conflict is a major contributing factor to poverty and an obstacle to the achievement of the MDGs. Thirty-three per cent of global displaced populations originate from the ESCWA region. The socio-economic impact therefore on both member states and displaced communities themselves is an issue to be assessed. ECRI has produced a comprehensive study on the matter which served as a background policy paper during the discussions of the brainstorming session.
4. Despite the fact that displacement is such a prevalent phenomenon and potentially destabilizing force in the Middle East, there have been few formal attempts to address the issue of displacement from a regional perspective.
5. The brainstorming session on the impact of conflict-driven displacement in the ESCWA region was organized by ECRI. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss and solicit input and comments on a draft Study on the Socio-economic Impact of Displacement in the ESCWA Region (the Study). The intention was to discuss all issues relating to the socio-economic impact of displacement on the region and on host countries with experts from UN agencies, think tanks and academic institutions. The session's principle objective while raising all relevant policy issues of displacement, future collaboration on research and policy development between ESCWA and participating agencies on the issues discussed.

## I. RECOMMENDATIONS

6. The participants of the brainstorming session agreed on the relevance and importance of the problem of displacement in this region and proposed the following recommendations for further research and collaboration, in addition to the policy recommendations which have been proposed by ECRI in the background study on displacement presented at the session:
  - (a) In future policy dialogues and research on this topic, it is important to take into consideration the voices and opinions of the displaced populations themselves. ECRI has requested that UN operational agencies working in the field with the displaced communities to collect information in this regard.
  - (b) Due to the diverse nature of the various displacement situations in this region and their impact on host countries, which are also diverse, it is important to conduct national impact studies for future research to understand case by case, the impact of displacement on a particular ESCWA member state. Collaboration in this regard with other UN agencies and institutions is encouraged.
  - (c) Due to the deficiencies in data and data collecting mechanisms concerning urban refugees in this region, who represent the majority of the most recent displaced, there is a need to build the capacity of host governments to ensure that such mechanisms are put in place. Surveys of urban refugees could be conducted in collaboration with organizations and UN agencies.
  - (d) The good governance deficient within state institutions needs to be addressed by member states, the United Nations and donors, which could mitigate the suffering of displaced persons. Collaboration could be envisaged between ECRI and UN agencies on building capacity of governments and their institutions.
  - (e) ECRI solicited inputs and suggestions from participants on a list of proposed future collaborative studies distributed during the session. (see Annex 1)

## II. DISCUSSION TOPICS

7. ECRI presented the findings, assessment and recommendations of the Study on the impact of conflict-driven displacement on the ESCWA region, which framed the discussion during the brainstorming session. The discussion covered the characteristics of displacement, including legal definitions and trends, the causes of displacement, durable solutions, impact on displaced populations and host countries, international assistance to the displaced and policy recommendations addressed to ESCWA member states and others
8. It was widely agreed during the discussions that ECRI's initiative to bring to the table the issue of displacement in the ESCWA region was both timely and relevant.
9. Participants reflected first on the issue of legal definitions of the displaced and its impact on operational responses and policy recommendations. The fact that the Palestinian refugees did not fall under the definition of refugee covered by the 1951 Refugee Convention was an issue to consider. The fact that they could also be considered under a fourth definition, that of stateless persons was also to be taken into consideration in future analyses, especially as stateless persons in most cases enjoy even fewer rights than IDPs and refugees.
10. Attempting to make clear distinctions in some cases between economic migrants, refugees, transit refugees/migrants and IDPs was agreed to be difficult in the ESCWA region as most recently displaced populations are urban and unregistered. As a result, meeting participants stressed the importance of clearly stating which types of populations are addressed in policy recommendations. Improving the accuracy of data collection by behalf of governments and aid agencies was also identified as an important goal. The focus of ECRI's interest in displacement is principally on the socio-economic impact on the region and therefore accurate data is a pre-condition for any policy development in that regard. It was also noted that displacement within a country and displacement across borders require have both different policy responses and different analytical frameworks.
11. During the debate on shelter models for refugees and IDPs, namely camps and urban settings, agencies confirmed that policy was not adequately developed with regards to assisting and managing large number of urban refugees. Imprecise information and data prevented policy development and targeted assistance.
12. Protracted displacement was discussed as an important phenomenon affecting this region. Participants concurred that state institutions in countries affected by conflict are weak and there is lack of good governance solutions for durable peace which ultimately leads to prolonged displacement.
13. Due to the rather different social, economic and political characteristics of each host country in this region and the variation in the level of impact of displaced populations on these countries, it is difficult to present the socio-economic impact generalized at the regional level. It was agreed that national level impact studies should be conducted in order to understand the full implications of hosting populations for each member state and thereby propose relevant policy recommendations. Furthermore, the

complexity of certain displacement situations such as the case of Sudan as well as Egypt, calls for in depth analysis and research on the full range of potential socio-economic implications of displacement for those countries.

14. In the consideration of durable solutions for displaced persons in the ESCWA region it is important to consider the issue of self-reliance, as resettlement and voluntary return are often politically sensitive or in some cases impossible. In this light, it was suggested that it would be relevant to perhaps analyse displaced populations in two categories, those who cannot return to their place of origin and those who can return or can be integrated in their place of asylum. This would enable an analysis of durable solutions relevant and possible for each specific case of displaced.
15. In the case of return, it was suggested that a study on how to tap into the resources and capacities (financial resources, self reliance, survival skills, entrepreneurship, etc.) of the displaced populations themselves would be relevant to provide an understanding on how best to plan return and the assistance thereof as well as understand what are the obstacles to that potential for voluntary return. Integration, another suggested durable solution to displacement has political implications for the region and therefore has been considered as a solution which could not be aggressively advocated for in this particular Study. In the case of protracted displacement however, it was mentioned that “integration” could mean granting certain basic rights such as right to employment and right to own property to populations who have been hosted for decades and whose socio-economic situation cannot improve without those basic rights, without the necessity of granting nationality.
16. Another important issue was raised with regards to dialogue with governments on the issue of displacement and how to present specific policy recommendations to these governments. It was concluded that it was important to stress the obligation of governments to recognize and respect the international and basic human rights of displaced persons, Recognition of responsibility for the displaced at the national level was stressed as critical and participants agreed that national level studies should be undertaken with regards to the member states’ compliance with international legal standards. Furthermore, it was noted that any constructive policy dialogue with member states should also include the non-state actors who bear responsibility for or are directly involved in the management and assistance of displaced populations.
17. International responsibility as well as regional support and aid for the displaced populations and their host countries is mainly assumed by certain countries and therefore participants called for further increased support by other ESCWA member states.

## ORGANISATION OF WORK

### A. VENUE AND DATE

18. The Brainstorming session on the impact of conflict-driven displacement in the ESCWA region was held at UN House in Beirut on 9 February 2009.

### B. OPENING

19. The session was opened by the Chief of ECRI, Mr. Tarik Alami. Following Mr. Alami's introductory remarks, ECRI's Economic Affairs Officer and Team Leader for the Displacement Study, Ms. Deirdre Connolly, made a brief presentation of the background study on the impact of conflict-driven displacement in the ESCWA region.

### C. PARTICIPANTS

20. ESCWA invited UN agencies, think tanks and academic institutions to participate in the brainstorming. A total of 13 participants contributed to the discussion. A list of attendees is provided in Annex 2.

### D. DOCUMENTATION

21. ECRI's presentation of the Study on displacement was distributed to participants. An electronic version of the presentation can be found on ECRI's website at <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/ecri.asp?division=ecri>. The complete study on the impact of conflict-induced displacement in the ESCWA region will be published soon and posted on ESCWA's website.

### E. ORGANIZERS

22. The ECRI Team responsible for drafting the background study, organizing the brainstorming session and leading the discussions included: Mr. Tarik Alami, Chief; Youssef Chaitani, First Economic Affairs Officer, Deirdre Connolly, Economic Affairs Officer and Team Leader for the Displacement Project, Kate Corenthal, Associate Programme Officer and Adeline Mills, Associate Economic Affairs Officer.

## ANNEX 1

### PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH/POLICY PAPERS

#### (a) Comparison and Analysis of the Different Frameworks for Protection and Assistance of Displaced in the ESCWA Region

There are attempts to centralize aid tracking and monitoring. How successful is this and how does it compare to efforts in the other countries under study. Can a regional approach to “aid for displacement” be conceived? How can efforts of civil society actors be integrated?

UNHCR is the sole supervisory international agency with a mandate to protect refugees. In the ESCWA region, this includes Iraqi and Sudanese refugees, and refugees from different populations in Egypt and Yemen.

Palestinian refugees are not included within the mandate of UNHCR, as they became refugees before the adoption of the Refugee Convention. UNRWA is the sole agency responsible for providing services to Palestinian refugees, but it does not have a protection mandate. Therefore, Palestinian refugees are a unique population of displaced persons, as there is no formal international mechanism for their protection (although UNRWA has adopted certain unofficial protection measures).

The “Cluster approach,” whereby a division of responsibilities is agreed for specific UN and non-UN partners under the coordination of UN OCHA, has been adopted by the UN with respect to assistance to IDPs. Therefore, Sudanese and Iraqi IDPs and IDPs in Lebanon, for instance, are protected and assisted through coordinated UN responses.

Such a paper would also include an analysis of the “gap” between humanitarian assistance and development for the displaced populations in the ESCWA region.

#### (b) An analysis of the quality of data on the different populations of displaced persons in the ESCWA region.

The quality of data available on the different displaced populations in the ESCWA region varies dramatically (compare Palestinian refugees in the oPt to Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, for instance). What are the different mechanisms for collecting baseline data and profiling the displaced populations, and how can they be improved? What obstacles are there? (For example, in Lebanon, asylum seekers are treated as illegal immigrants and remain in hiding. Compare to Syria and Jordan). Can certain aspects of more successful frameworks be duplicated for other displacement situations?)

#### (c) Durable Solutions for the ESCWA Region Displaced: an Analysis of the Possibilities of Restitution, Repatriation, Resettlement and Absorption for Palestinian Refugees, Iraqi and Sudanese Refugees and IDPs in Iraq, Sudan and Lebanon

The rights of displaced persons in the ESCWA region are defined under and implemented by different international and institutional mechanisms. What remedies and long term solutions do these different mechanisms provide, and how effective are they? What are the implications of each for the region.

(d) Refugee, Asylum and IDP Policies of ESCWA member states, and the Implications thereof for Displaced Persons and the Region as a whole

What are the policies of ESCWA member states with respect to entry, asylum, absorption, settlement and return? What degree or responsibility do different ESCWA member states take for the displaced in the region, what is the burden on the member states? Is it equitable, and what are the implications for the region as a whole?

Which ESCWA member countries are signatories to UN treaties and other international agreements concerning refugees and IDPs. What are policies of ESCWA member countries with respect to refugees wishing to enter their country? How do host countries register and document refugees. What programmes/policies do they have in place to provide basic assistance as well as improving livelihoods and reducing dependence?

(e) An in depth look at the most vulnerable displaced in the ESCWA region; women and children. What are the problems they face (loss of male head of household, sexual violence, forced or under-aged labour, etc.) What mechanisms are in place to obtain data on their status and to provide them with special assistance? Compare and contrast the problems facing the different displaced populations and the responses from the national and international community.

(f) The Status and Treatment of Returnees in the region

- Study Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq and Nahr el-Bared and Gaza Strip
- What approach is there to sustaining livelihoods? There was a study on the evaluation of markets and vocational training needs for Sudanese IDPs and refugees returning to Sudan– has it been done in the other countries in this region and could a regional approach be developed for creating sustainable livelihoods for displaced.

(g) Comparison and Analysis of the Impact of Displacement of ESCWA States on the National Level

Due to the diversity of impact of forced displacement on countries in the region, it would be useful to examine the socio-economic impact of refugees on individual countries, using rigorous economic analysis and to evaluate these impacts in a comparative analysis.

## ANNEX 2

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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