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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**REPORT****OF THE BRAINSTORMING SESSION ON THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT-DRIVEN
DISPLACEMENT IN THE ESCWA REGION
BEIRUT, 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) in order to discuss and solicit inputs and comments on a forthcoming ESCWA study on the socio-economic impact of displacement in the ESCWA region. The session provided an opportunity to discuss the challenges posed by displaced populations on host countries in the region, as well as possible solutions to these challenges. Other topics covered during the session included the need to formulate clear policy recommendations for ESCWA member countries and future collaboration between ECRI and United Nations agencies on regional responses to the problem of displacement.

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Introduction

1. The section for Emerging and Conflict Related Issues (ECRI) was created to address conflict-related issues, analyse the regional impact of conflicts and derive policy recommendations. ECRI is also active in assisting member countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to achieve their development goals in the context of ongoing conflicts or instability.
2. 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. Conflict-related displacement is a major contributing factor to poverty and an obstacle to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Thirty-three per cent of the world's displaced population originates from the ESCWA region; however, despite the scale and importance of this phenomenon, few attempts have been made to address the issue of displacement from a regional perspective.
3. 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 inputs and comments on a draft study on the socio-economic impact of displacement in the ESCWA region (hereafter referred to as "the study"). The session was held to discuss, among others, the socio-economic impact of displacement on the region and on host countries, relevant policy issues, and future collaboration on research and policy development between ESCWA and United Nations agencies, think tanks and academic institutions.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Participants agreed that displacement was an important issue in the ESCWA region and proposed the following recommendations as topics for further research and collaboration:
 - (a) The voices and opinions of displaced persons need to be taken into consideration in future policy dialogues and research. To this end, ECRI called on United Nations agencies working with displaced communities to collect relevant information;
 - (b) National impact studies are needed to understand the impact of displacement on individual ESCWA member countries. Collaboration in this regard with concerned United Nations agencies and organizations is therefore to be encouraged;
 - (c) Capacity-building efforts are needed to assist host Governments to gather data on urban refugees in the region. Surveys of urban refugees could be conducted in collaboration with relevant United Nations agencies and organizations;
 - (d) The issue of good governance within State institutions in the ESCWA region needs to be addressed by member countries, the United Nations and donors in order to mitigate the suffering of displaced persons. Cooperation could be envisaged between ECRI and United Nations agencies on building the capacity of regional Governments and their institutions;
 - (e) Participating agencies and organizations are invited to provide inputs and suggestions on proposed future collaborative studies (see annex I).

II. DISCUSSION TOPICS

5. Participants considered that addressing the issue of displacement in the ESCWA region was both timely and relevant.
6. The section for Emerging and Conflict Related Issues presented the main findings and recommendations of the study. The ensuing discussion covered the following issues: the characteristics of

displacement, including legal definitions and trends; the causes of displacement; durable solutions; the impact of displaced populations on host countries; international assistance to the displaced; and policy recommendations to address these issues.

7. Participants examined existing legal definitions on displaced persons and the impact of these definitions on operational responses and policy recommendations. A matter of concern was that Palestinian refugees were not recognized as refugees in the 1951 Refugee Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and that their status as stateless persons needed to be taken into account in future analyses, especially as in most cases stateless persons enjoy even fewer rights than internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees.

8. Participants concurred that it was difficult to make clear distinctions between economic migrants, refugees, transit refugees/migrants and IDPs in the ESCWA region, particularly as recently displaced populations have tended to congregate in urban areas and were not registered as refugees with relevant authorities and United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Internal displacement and cross-border displacement require different policy responses and analytical frameworks; it is therefore important that policy recommendations clearly define the displaced populations they were intended for. Accurate data is a precondition for policy development, particularly as ECRI focuses on the regional socio-economic impact of displacement. It is therefore important to improve the accuracy of data collection by Governments, United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

9. United Nations agencies attending the session confirmed that existing policies were not effective in assisting and managing large numbers of urban refugees. Imprecise information and data prevented policy development and targeted assistance.

10. Protracted displacement was a particularly important phenomenon in the ESCWA region. Weak State institutions in conflict-affected countries and the absence of good governance make it difficult to achieve a durable peace, which ultimately leads to prolonged displacement.

11. The different social, economic and political characteristics of each host country in the region make it difficult to formulate a region-wide assessment of the socio-economic impact of displaced populations. Impact studies therefore need to be conducted at the national level in order to understand the implications of hosting populations on member countries and propose relevant policy recommendations. Furthermore, the complexity of some displacement contexts, for example in the Sudan and Egypt, calls for in-depth analysis and research on the full range of potential socio-economic implications of displacement on those countries.

12. Self-reliance was an important element to take into consideration in the search for durable solutions for displaced persons in the ESCWA region, as resettlement and voluntary return are often politically sensitive and, in some cases, impossible. A distinction therefore needs to be made between displaced populations between those who can, and those who cannot, return to their place of origin, as well as those who can, or cannot, be integrated in their place of asylum. This would enable an analysis of potentially sustainable solutions for displaced persons.

13. A study on the individual resources and capacities of displaced populations in coping with conflict-induced displacement (financial resources, self-reliance, survival skills, entrepreneurship, etc.), would result in a better understanding of how to plan and assist their return to their place or country of origin. Integration of displaced populations has political implications for the region and was therefore not considered as a solution in the study. In the case of protracted displacement, “integration” could entail granting certain basic rights to displaced populations who had been living in a country for decades, for example the right to employment and the right to own property.

14. Participants agreed that it was important to engage and present policy recommendations to Governments on the issue of displacement and remind them of the need to recognize and respect their human

rights obligations vis-à-vis displaced persons. Responsibility for the displaced needs to be taken at the national level and country studies are required to check compliance with international legal standards. Furthermore, a constructive policy dialogue with member countries should also include non-state actors involved in programmes to assist displaced populations.

15. The numbers of ESCWA member countries engaged in providing support and aid for displaced populations needs to be broadened beyond the handful of countries that have traditionally provided such assistance.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

16. 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

17. The session was opened by Mr. Tarik Alami, Chief of ECRI. Following Mr. Alami's introductory remarks, Ms. Deirdre Connolly, Economic Affairs Officer, made a brief presentation on the study.

C. PARTICIPANTS

18. ESCWA invited United Nations agencies, think tanks and academic institutions to participate in the brainstorming meeting. A total of 13 participants contributed to the discussion. A list of attendees is provided in annex II.

D. DOCUMENTATION

19. An ECRI presentation on the study was distributed to participants. An electronic version of this presentation is available at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/ecri.asp?division=ecri>. The complete study will be published shortly and posted on the ESCWA website.

E. ORGANIZERS

20. The ECRI team responsible for drafting the study, organizing the brainstorming meeting 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 I

PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND POLICY PAPERS

The following proposals were presented as topics for future research and policy papers:

(a) Comparison and analysis of the different frameworks for protection and assistance of displaced persons in the ESCWA region;

Attempts have been made to centralize aid tracking and monitoring. How successful have they been and how do they compare with efforts in other countries under study. Can a regional approach providing “aid for displacement” be conceived? And how can the efforts of civil society actors be integrated in a centralized aid tracking and monitoring mechanism?

Palestinian refugees are not included within the mandate of the UNHCR, as they became refugees before the adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is the sole agency responsible for providing services to Palestinian refugees, but it does not have a protection mandate. Therefore, Palestinian refugees are unique in that they are the only population of displaced persons that is not covered by a formal international protection mechanism, although UNRWA has adopted certain unofficial protection measures.

The “cluster approach”, whereby a division of responsibilities is agreed for specific United Nations and other partners under the coordination of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has been adopted by the United Nations with respect to assistance to IDPs. Therefore, Sudanese and Iraqi IDPs and IDPs in Lebanon, for instance, are protected and assisted through coordinated responses by United Nations agencies.

The proposed paper would also include an analysis of the “gap” between humanitarian assistance and development for 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 displaced populations in the ESCWA region varies dramatically. What are the different mechanisms for collecting baseline data and profiling 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. Can certain aspects of more successful frameworks be replicated in other displacement situations?

(c) Durable solutions for displaced population in the ESCWA region: an analysis of the possibilities of repatriation, resettlement and absorption for Palestinian refugees, Iraqi and Sudanese refugees and IDPs in Iraq, the 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 countries, and the implications of these policies on displaced persons and the region as a whole;

The research would determine the policies of ESCWA member countries with respect to entry, asylum, absorption, settlement and return. It would also determine the degree of responsibility taken by

different ESCWA member countries for displaced persons in the region, and the burden placed on member countries? What are the implications for the region as a whole?

Which ESCWA member countries are signatories to United Nations treaties and other international agreements governing refugees and IDPs? What are the 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 on external assistance?

(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 head of household, sexual violence, forced or under-aged labour, etc.)? What mechanisms are in place to obtain data on their status and 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;

This research will focus on the status and treatment of returnees in the Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq, Nahr el-Bared refugee camp and Gaza Strip. It will examine the approach taken to sustain livelihoods, and will examine whether any other countries in the region have conducted studies on vocational training needs and labour markets for returning IDPs and refugees. It will also address whether a regional approach could be developed to create sustainable livelihoods for displaced persons.

(g) Comparison and analysis of the impact of displacement of ESCWA countries at the national level.

The research will examine the socio-economic impact of refugees on individual countries, and use rigorous economic analysis and evaluate any impact in a comparative manner.

Annex II*

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