

Displacement Reality in NES



ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies

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Introduction:

The Syrian revolution has resulted in, since its inception in March 2011, a set of civil, political and social problems and challenges, most notably and most severe to the Syrians situation. The internal displacement file which extended catastrophically, due to the progressive military conflicts in the Syrian arena among different international and local forces, which resulted in large displacement waves towards cities and villages that witness relatively stable conditions as well as seeking for asylum outside the country.

The Syrian civil organizations have, according to its available and limited capabilities contributed to limit some of the repercussions of the Syrian displacement, which were not at the required level, yet were appropriate to the nature of the available resources at organizations, especially the areas that came out of the Syrian regime authority, or that the Syrian regime is incapable to control their security and military, such as areas under the control of the Self-Administration in NES, which include 15 organized camps, that shelter more than half a million of displaced Syrians.

The Turkish military attacks beside Syrian military forces, most of which are radical, influenced the displacement condition in the areas of the Self-Administration, as the operations (Euphrates Shield- Olive Branch- Spring of Peace) that targeted the cities and towns of which the majority are Kurdish and are located within the Kurdish vital sphere in Syria, have led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians from borderland towns and cities towards areas under the SDF and far from the Turkish-Syrian border, which transformed into a big camp that shelter the displaced in tents and schools.

The displaced endure all types of sufferance in their livelihood, in tragic conditions and terrible situations at all educational, health, social and economic sectors; in the midst of a severe deprivation of the basic services, increasing aggravation of needs, whether in camps or in host villages and cities.

Despite the wide space for local and international civil organizations work in different sectors, however they were not able to meet the displaced needs through their programs and projects, as the support provided at all aspects is still incommensurable with the number present, in addition to its constant increase, whether in food security and livelihood sector or water and sanitation and shelter sectors, "providing tents for random camps", education and protection, and most recently the medical sector due to the emerging Covid-19 pandemic.

An Overview of Displacement in Syria in General:

The Syrian crisis is one of the largest humanitarian crises and the most complicated one today. Despite the recession of the military forces largely in some areas, the number of the IDPs reached 6.2 million persons. Indeed, the humanitarian needs in Syria are massive in terms of size, severity and complexity with the continuation of existing risks in a number of areas as for protection. About 12.8 million people are in need of humanitarian aids, among them 5.2 million people are in indigent need of support inside Syria, including four million

children. Half of a million children suffer from chronic malnutrition according to the UNHCR statistics.¹

These statistics of the displaced issued in infrequent periods of time concerning the size of those living in camps or integrated in the host communities or have been resettled in residential homes, do not form the final or the constant numbers of the displaced; as these numbers are variable, unsteady and directly linked to the military shifts and sometimes economic-livelihood- which take place in some Syrian cities and towns.

Every military operation carried out by the different parties participating in the Syrian conflict results a new wave of displacement which is occasionally concentrated in two main areas; the area controlled by the Syrian opposition which is backed by Ankara, as well as, areas of the Self-Administration and the SDF. Since 2018, the displaced conditions have worsened considerably due to the Turkish attacks which targeted the Kurdish cities in Syria.

Besides, there are frequent displacement of some Syrian civil groups. For example, cities like Serekaniye/Ras al-Ain in al-Hasaka governorate and Gire Spi/Tell Abyad were stable and resided by thousands of displaced Syrians, however, after they were exposed to Turkish attacks, they became displaced again. More clearly, the displaced Syrians have no obvious zone of stability. They live in areas that are partially and temporarily stable and they are vulnerable to displacement once again, according to the military and political shifts the country witnesses.

In this sense, the IDPs in Syria are instable displaced persons, rather they can be called as the mobile displaced, whose place, residence and nature of displacement are determined by the conflict. Therefore, there is a need of continuing the support for the displaced and large-scale reconstruction in order to allow a sustainable return. The number of the displaced seeking for shelter in temporary residence and collective camps has increased by 42% within one year reaching 1.2 million this year. According to data by the United Nations, nine years of conflict have left devastating effects upon Syrians; 64% of hospitals and 54% of primary health care centers were only the ones implementing its functions completely until the end of the last year. And nearly 70% of those functioning in health sectors left the country.²

About 100 thousand persons live in camps in NES, who don't have access to the basic services and whose expectations are limited to immediate home return. In other areas, many of the Syrians whose lives have been turned upside down due to the conflict, rely on the humanitarian aids to feed their families because of difficult economic situations.³

According to the current context and international reports, it is expected that the displaced would suffer, whether in camps or in host communities, from a deprivation of the basic services until 2021, especially after the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic, and its global

¹ The UNHCR, Work Environment <https://www.unhcr.org/ar/4be7cc278bc.html>

² The UN: there is a need of 8.5 billion dollars to meet humanitarian needs in Syria and support the IDPs in the region <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/03/1050791>

³ The UN: there is a need of 8.5 billion dollars to meet humanitarian needs in Syria and support the IDPs in the region <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/03/1050791>

economic consequences which extremely affected the amount of humanitarian support provided to the displaced.

The Reality of Displacement in Camps:

The displaced live under extremely complicated humanitarian conditions at all levels and aspects. The efforts exerted, do not fit the size of the enormous needs. In addition, the continued number of the displaced is undermining the local authority perseverance in the limitation of the current difficulties and providing the lowest requirements of dignified life.

The Democratic Self-Administration in NES and local and international organization concerned with humanitarian and relief affairs are incapable of providing the displaced with food and water properly inside camps, the thing which results in victims because of bad humanitarian conditions.

Nearly 40,000 children still live in al-Hol camp alone, who are descended from more than 60 countries and they lack basic services and are obliged to bear the summer heat and the traumas left by violence and vagrancy.⁴

In August and in less than a week, there were four death cases of children under the age of five because of side effects related to malnutrition, while other deaths occurred due to dehydration from diarrhea, heart failure, internal bleeding and hypoglycemia.⁵

There is also the shortage of heating equipment, fuel, basic materials and blankets across displacement camps in NES, especially the newly established camps; such as the Washokani camp; Ras al-Ain camp in Al-Hasaka city and its countryside and Tell al-Samn camp in the countryside of Raqqa, in which the sewage services and the concrete floors have not been equipped in order to fit winter season, as well as the marginalized health sector inside the camps, which warn the possibility of disease and contagious pandemics outbreak.

The outbreak of Coronavirus was another reason for retrogression in the levels of the services given by the humanitarian international organizations and the local and civil organizations inside camps.

The lack of services is not limited to the primary needs of the displaced in the camps, but rather includes all basic sectors, as the education sector in NES is similar to other sectors. For there is a severe shortage and lack of educational services and resources given to the displaced, especially children in the primary level of education. Most of the children in the camps and shelters do not get their right to formal education, because organizations focus on the relief and health sector, and hence education is marginalized.⁶

Authorities in some camps allow the inhabitants to leave temporarily. It seems that the freedom degrees vary from one camp to another. Authorities strictly prohibit the movement

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Eight children died in Al-Hol camp in NES in less than a week <https://uni.cf/3mUEDPg>

⁶ Ideas have been Put Forward in Sessions Held by ASO center with Participants Operating in the Civil Society

of Syrian families who have relatives suspected as belonging to ISIS, according to what the families themselves and camp authorities stated in newspapers and TV news.

In another context, the inhabitants of the camps are obliged to deal with smugglers to leave the camps, obtain health care or to join their families, as the Allied countries have not adopted a unified legal procedure to recover their citizens who joined ISIS and because most of these families have lost their personal documents (identity). The authorities and international bodies did not prove adequately that restricting the movement of those persons is a necessity with legitimate security reasons or any other reasons.⁷

Ain Issa camp in Raqqa governorate hosts Syrians, Iraqis and ISIS suspected foreign fighters. The camp provides a maximum degree of freedom to move for the Syrian population. Syrians can go – after obtaining permission- to the market, make visits and seek treatment in medical centers as required. However, the authorities imposed a complete prohibition on Iraqis and foreign families whose relatives are under suspect of being with ISIS. In Al Sadd camp (also known as Areesha), which hosts families displaced from Syria, there were even more severe restrictions. As for temporary visits and vacations, residents receive a temporary exit permit only when they are able to prove a robust medical need or have been registered in a local university. They can only leave for two days after affording the process of obtaining the permit and transportation. Authorities in the camp determine the number of residents that can leave the camp at 30 persons per day. Al-Hol camp which is run by the “UNHCR” and the Self-Administration authorities, hosts Syrians and Iraqis, including families who are suspected of being ISIS members. ISIS suspected families are not allowed to leave the camp, although authorities of the camp provide them with temporary permits for medical visits.⁸

Children make up to two thirds of the population in the camp, medical needs are still enormous, including maternal and child health care, pediatrics, surgery, mental health, physical rehabilitation and chronic diseases, and it is for sure the displaced population experienced frequent traumas and severe stress.⁹

The World Health Organization (WHO) provides support to the medical sector after the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic and it mainly uses al-Yarubiyah crossing gate to supply the region with medical aids.

For many reasons, the medical infrastructure is fragile and weak, and the region suffers from shortage of medical materials, including devices and equipment, and Covid-19 has taken thousands of souls in the region generally to death, though. Daily infections increase and combating possibility remains weak and useless.

⁷ Syria: thousands of IDPs stuck in camps <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2018/08/01/320721>

⁸ Syria: thousands of IDPs stuck in camps <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2018/08/01/320721>

⁹ NES: millions face shortage of water and broken-down health services. <https://bit.ly/3puDIMn>

The Reality of Displacement in Cities and Villages (Host Communities):

The IDPs within cities and villages (the host community) don't receive humanitarian aids, but rarely and very less, which are insufficient to meet their needs. An example for that "winter-heating materials were distributed in winter, yet they were limited to camps alone, while none was provided to the displaced within cities and towns", this turns back to financing policies imposed by donor organizations, and the issue that camps and centers contain people who are in need at most according to their view, yet this is wrong as the displaced within cities are also in need to receive aids and provide them with opportunities in the worst conditions, they are forcibly displaced and they left all their possessions and provisions behind. And this is a dilemma which competent authorities and civil institutions have not concentrated on yet.¹⁰

In comparison between the displaced from cities and villages, the conditions of the latter are considered as good, compared to the first, but they are also considered below poverty-rate, except that they dwell in houses not tents and they are considered as lucky and privileged for having that. Among them who work from morning to evening in order to provide their bread and butter and their bad-quality rental house to pay. Many of them suffer from a set of difficulties for among them they are those who work for only two or three days weekly.

Also, some of the displaced who dwell in cities where they were employed with Syrian regime and the Self-Administration. An employment was provided for them in cities where they displaced to, but salaries remain very low in comparison with livelihood requirements of residence, clothing and food. This displaced group of people suffer from difficult economic pressures because of high prices due to the deterioration of Syrian currency compared to the value of foreign currency.¹¹

As for the health situation, the displaced in cities also suffer from many chronic and surgical diseases, but they are not targeted neither by civil organizations nor by the responsible authorities and also suffer from psychological traumas and problems due to war, displacement, loss and killing, yet they neglect themselves and turn to more important issues for them which are how to provide their daily bread and butter and their children livelihood needs as far as they can't afford psychological therapy in light of their difficult conditions.¹²

Challenges:

First: Economic (Livelihood):

Livelihood economic reality of the displaced is a bad reality, given that aid is limited to the monthly supplies provided to them by civil organizations. Thus, they live below the poverty-rate. Some of them are considered privileged as they work in cleaning camps within projects conducted by some organizations from which they receive few daily amounts of payments

¹⁰ Based on views expressed by members of the organizations at recent dialogue sessions conducted by ASO Center

¹¹ Based on views expressed by members of the organizations at recent dialogue sessions conducted by ASO Center

¹² Based on views of some urban IDPs in individual interviews conducted by ASO Center

(Cash For Work). They suffer from lack of job opportunities from one side and low payments from another side as they are exploited by their employers over payments that don't correspond their efforts and works.

The conditions of the IDPs in cities and villages (the host community) are somehow good compared to the IDPs in camps. Nevertheless, they also suffer from difficult livelihood conditions, as humanitarian aid is not provided to them in comparison with those inside camps. Many of them are obliged to work in difficult jobs for long hours so as to secure their daily food, as well as the semi-daily sufferance for obtaining necessary daily requirements, some of them suffer from unemployment and few weekly days of work - labor class – since the region is experiencing an economic crisis due to the ongoing war in the country for ten years.

Many of them preferred displacement towards the city as they are employed at the Self-Administration and the Syrian Regime for salaries are still valid, yet considered little comparing with livelihood requirements, including residence, clothing and food. This class of IDPs suffer from hard economic pressures due to high prices because of the deterioration of the value of Syrian currency with foreign currencies values. They also want the competent authorities and civil organizations to either contribute in providing aids for them, or to reconsider the increase of their salaries in Syrian Pounds of which the value is decreasing daily comparing to the daily exchange rate of dollar.¹³

Second: Health (Psychological and Physical Health):

Due to the conditions of war and military operations between many armed forces and factions, the use of all different types of weapons, even that which is internationally forbidden such as chemical weapons and white phosphorus, and the blood-soaked Syrian scene, increased cases of abuse, torture and loss, reaching to mutilation. All these led to catastrophic consequences over Syrians in general and the displaced in particular. All of this is the result of the frequent and successive traumas as well as experiencing the reality which disrupted physical and psychological structure. Thus, it led to many health problems; physically and psychologically. International reports and field surveys refer to limited access the displaced have, to mental and psychological health services in comparison with physical health services.

The health services provided to the displaced are totally insufficient because of the weakness of abilities of competent civil organizations in this sector. For services given in camps are incapable to meet patient's needs, especially who suffer from chronic diseases. Also, the ability of organizations to qualify the infrastructure starting from repairing sewage networks, paving roads and isolating camps is weak, especially in newly- constructed camps.

The organizations supporting the medical sector are (WHO) and the humanitarian organization of medicines sans frontieres (MSF). They also support a number of governmental hospitals and local medical institutions in the region, yet despite this, current

¹³ Based on views of some urban IDPs in individual interviews conducted by ASO Center

absorptive capacity is dwindling compared to the displaced numbers. Noting that most of medical facilities are incapable of responding specialized surgical needs for cases present there. The ability to provide high-cost medical services like (open-heart operations and some other) are not available. Here the displaced is obliged to take a debt of his relatives or often stands helpless in front of his issue. This is applied to those displaced within cities and villages. Providing personal protection and avoidance equipment, and its requirements for the IDPs and medical staff operating in the region, especially inside camps and shelter centers is weak.

As for the services provided by psychological health institution, a huge percentage of the displaced children face challenges concerning growth and mental capabilities. According to one of the participants, competent organizations statistics indicate that "the most common and strongest clinical problems among IDPs are emotional disorders, like depression, prolonged grief disorder, post-traumatic disorder and various forms of anxiety disorder." The lack of suitable therapy and the continuation of high-pressure levels lead to worsen situations while medical care for those afflicted with mental disorders remains unattainable for many of them, as specialized psychological health centers are rare in the region. Host communities also suffer from psychological traumas and problems due to war, displacement, loss and killing, but they neglect themselves as they don't realize the amount of damage of psychological disorders in light of the current conditions, as well as the level of awareness plays its role.¹⁴

Third: education:

The educational reality is inseparable from general reality context, as there is much suffering and a lot of difficulties in this sector which is considered as secondary sector by many. As for the operating humanitarian organizations in camps and the host community alike, priority is for relief sector.

It is difficult to determine the educational conditions for the displaced in detail and accurately. For education has gone through various forms and bodies in NES areas as educational curricula varied with the variety of controlling military forces which resulted in the deprivation of hundreds of thousands of children from education, especially the displaced.

It is difficult to determine the displaced educational conditions in details and accurately, as the displacement has led to the exhaustion of the already-deteriorating systems throughout Syria, especially in NES. For education has gone through various forms and bodies in NES areas as educational curricula varied with the variety of controlling military forces which resulted in the deprivation of hundreds of thousands of children from education, especially the displaced.

¹⁴ Based on views expressed by members of the organizations at recent dialogue sessions conducted by ASO Center

Harsh financial conditions play a role in the deprivation of education, as many of the children are obliged to work in order to support their families financially instead of going to schools, which has led to the recent emergence of (child labor) phenomenon in the region due to the increase of the number of the displaced.

In addition, there is a restriction on the movement of the displaced in some camps, as about 90 thousand Syrians, Iraqis and third-country citizens who have alleged familial relations with ISIS live in overcrowded displacement camps such as al-Hol camp, still about 85 thousand children from more than 60 country are detained in camps controlled by the SDF.¹⁵ The thing which causes the displaced to lose the possibility of obtaining education at schools, or institutions or universities outside the camps.

The services provided by the civil organizations are insufficient and we are incapable of including it into formal educational framework, for it requires enormous amount of money and resources, starting from teaching staff, structures and the infrastructure, thus organizations are orientated to provide education characterized by simple potentials so as individuals don't remain illiterate.

This is the condition of the majority of displaced children within cities, as educational process needs providing suitable social and material conditions. This is not possible in the absence of the state, especially the area is security-unstable, and in any moment conflict parties may compromise over it.¹⁶

Fourth: Other Challenges:

The displaced face some other challenges, especially when it comes to women in war times, as they need special support and care by civil organizations and especially feminist ones, for violations against women like "kidnapping, rape, body-mutilation and various types of violence, especially GBV (gender-based violence, which happen to women in wars by conflicting parties, extremist groups and gangs, especially in light of security-chaos due to successive attacks on the region generally.)"

As for the level of social cohesion, especially in NES which contains various social intervention among nationalities, ethnicities, sects, religions and other beliefs. Many of the displaced inside host communities suffer from many social difficulties and challenges like weakness of integration as well as many negative images and social attitudes, which lead to a state of fragmentation and social dispersion and weakness of relationships among them, to some states of tension and conflict, which sometimes reach to practicing violence level. Thus, civil organizations shall go to empowering and enhancing interactions and relations inside the community in general. It is also necessary to operate on creating a law based on social justice

¹⁵ Human Rights Commission urges countries to aid their national who are stuck in Syrian camps.

<https://bit.ly/3puDIMn>

¹⁶ Based on views of some educational specialists during individual interviews conducted by ASO Center

and equality principle in order to keep public stability in the region, and also to enhance partnership spirit among indigenous people and the displaced.¹⁷

International and Local Reactions:

The high commission for human rights called to aid the so-called “third-country nationals” who live in the overcrowded displacement camps such as al-Hol and Roj camp in NES. The countries those nationals belong to called for holding immediate measures to turn them back to their countries of origin in light of the risky restrictions upon reaching humanitarian aids and risks linked to Covid-19.

The UNHCR expressed its extreme concerns about the dilemma of thousands of third-country nationals, namely countries other than Syria or its direct neighbor, Iraq, most of them are women and children. They are stuck in displacement camps in NES, as the majority have been taken to camps in 2019 after ISIS defeat in the last stronghold of the organization, Deir Ezzor and also thousands who are stuck in al-Hol camp since 2016.

When people go back to their countries, countries can walk forward in rehabilitation measures, reintegration, investigation and prosecution if necessary. Many countries of origin have robust criminal justice systems that are able to investigate fairly and effectively with those against whom there are sufficient pieces of evidence of criminal behavior. All states should bear the responsibility of their citizens according to its obligation under the international law. Many individuals inside camps are already victims of serious human rights violations, as women, girls and boys are tormented by sexual violence, being subjected to trafficking, forced marriage, sexual slavery and exploitation by groups considered by the United Nations as terrorist. In the light of aggravating risks of Covid-19, which curbed present authorities' capabilities to ensure sufficient security in the overcrowded camps and limited its impacts. The thing which may cause a rebound impact on the international community efforts to combat terrorism in the region.¹⁸

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) warned that “the IDPs living in extremely overcrowded camps lack suitable health care, shelter, water and sanitation, the thing which makes great challenges to efforts of protecting them from diseases” specifically in al-Hol camp.¹⁹

The Self-Administration of NES, mentioned through a statement it issued, that the humanitarian conditions of the IDPs from cities affected by the aggression are worsened, directing an immediate appeal to the UN organization, Arab League and EU countries to

¹⁷ Based on views expressed by members of the organizations at recent dialogue sessions conducted by ASO Center

¹⁸ Human Rights Commission urges countries to aid their nationals who are stuck in Syrian camps. <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/06/1056982>

¹⁹ New IRC analysis reveals risk that coronavirus transmission rates in Moria, Al Hol and Cox's Bazar refugee camps could outpace those seen on the Diamond Princess cruise ship. <https://0i.is/ZL9j>

provide humanitarian aid to the IDPs in order to avoid the aggravation of the humanitarian crisis caused by the barbaric Turkish attacks.²⁰

The local reactions were limited to a group of data and media statements, which were presented to the international organizations and bodies, so as to urge them to intervene to meet the IDPs needs, while the Syrian government was, and remains silent concerning the IDPs conditions in NES areas.

Responsibility and Role of Conflicting Parties:

It is important that struggling and conflicting parties in Syria abide by keeping the war away from civilian-populated places and ensure that the IDPs are not harmed. Likewise, it is important that the different political and military groups which control Syria provide the basics of life for the IDPs as well as securing an adequate protection and security for the international and local organizations in order to work for providing basic services to the IDPs.

Displacement Consequences:

Displacement has many consequences, some of which are on short-terms and some others are on long-terms, enormous changes emanate from it in political, security, economic and social affairs. By analyzing the current dynamics of the displacement in the areas, some repercussions often emanate from it too, some of them are for public protection priorities purpose in the region, building legal frameworks to improve labor market, eliminate corruption due to international organizations coming and enhance social coherence through setting courses for capacity building and exchange cultures and customs with the IDPs in order to establish a more coherent and receptive society, as well as, to consolidate relations between the host communities and the IDPs.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Through what has been mentioned as for the reality of the displacement across Syria, especially in areas out of the Syrian regime control, which experience continuous conflicts between the international conflicting parties on the Syrian land for ten years in NES, we conclude that the IDPs suffer from various types of daily tragedies and difficulties, starting from livelihood to long-term psychological and physical health, which is an effect for sure, and still negatively affects the region in general as for the security, social and economic aspects.

On this basis, the international community and related international organizations are expected to support camps sectors through a set of recommendations:

1. International community shall support livelihood projects and relief/humanitarian projects of local and international organizations working in NES for the purpose of developing the displaced abilities to develop oneself and depend on themselves through providing small projects for them.

²⁰ The statement of the Self-Administration in NES, Ain Issa 15-10-2020

2. Operating and coordinating between political actors for reopening al-Yarubiyah crossing in NES, as there are millions of Syrians in these areas who need humanitarian aids.
3. It is important for the Self-Administration to operate on issuing laws private to the displaced and their conditions-improvement and to work on providing jobs and life opportunities for them outside the camps.
4. Supporting medical, health and psychological rehabilitation sectors by local and international organizations, especially for those with special needs, in the meantime of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, in particular.
5. Pay more attention to the displaced in random camps and host communities and treat them as the displaced in official camps.
6. Enhancing community cohesion between the displaced and host community, and work on changing the negative view of the host community towards the displaced.
7. Supporting educational projects and demanding concerned UN institutions to adopt education and construct its infrastructure.
8. Supporting human rights organizations for documenting the references and rights of the displaced who were damaged due to forced displacement.
9. Increasing coordination and enhancing collaboration between local CSOs aiming to unify their efforts to avoid any potential predicaments.
10. Increasing cooperation and networking between local and international organizations in common work towards cases concerning the displaced and displacement camps.
11. Increasing the mobilization of support and advocacy for setting plans that ensure easy movement of IDPs workers and freedom of movement within the host country and to other countries.
12. Searching for legal frameworks and regional ways which provide protection for IDPs as well as enhancing the development of the national and regional protection space that always needs continuous research and exploration.

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