



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط

The Middle East Council of Churches

Head Office

Beirut, Lebanon. P.O. Box 11-5376

Tel: +961 1 353938 / Fax: +961 1 344896

info@mecc.org / www.mecc.org



MIDDLE EAST OVERVIEW *October 2019*



Contents

1. BACKGROUND	2
2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION.....	3
Egypt	3
Jordan	3
Iraq.....	4
Lebanon	5
Palestine	6
Syria	6
Cyprus	7
3. THE REFUGEE SITUATION (Updated)	8
Egypt	8
Jordan	8
Iraq.....	9
Lebanon	10
Syria	11
Cyprus	17
4. CHURCH ACTIVITIES.....	18
5. MECC HEADQUARTERS ACTIVITIES.....	22
6. MECC Humanitarian activities October 2019	26
7. CONCLUSION	31



1. BACKGROUND

This month, a series of events shook the Middle East, foretelling an impending tectonic shift in the region. Due to inept governments and rampant corruption, demonstrations made their way across capitals calling for change and the implementation of reforms. Moreover, Turkey launched an extensive military operation in Syria, impacting peace efforts in Syria and the balance of power in the region. This leads us to the realization that uncertainty is once again engulfing the area.

Since it is quite difficult to maneuver through the coming storm, the MECC is ramping up its efforts to improve its capabilities. During October, the council succeeded in deepening its partnership with partners such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Churches which include United States Presbyterian Evangelical Church (PCUSA). Also, the MECC in partnership with other actors, is currently working behind the scenes, on various projects in rest oratory work and inter-religious peace.



2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

Egypt

- According to The Central Bank of Egypt's Governor Tarek Amer, the total deposits in Egypt's banking system now totaled 4 trillion EGP.¹
- In an attempt to restore the country's economy, Egypt decreased the fuel prices. This move according to Egyptian President Al-Sisi should "protect poor and Middle Class" citizens.²
- The International Fund for Agricultural Development opened a regional office in the Egyptian capital Cairo. It is assumed that the center will help the country manage its agriculture development.³
- Egypt's ministers of investment and electricity signed two agreements with the French Development Agency (FDA) that aim to boost Egypt's energy and natural gas sectors worth a total of €71 million.⁴
- Egypt moved up from 40th in the Competitive Index rank to 39th since 2019, according to a report for by the World Economic Forum.⁵
- 16.2517 EG/USD official currency exchange rate.⁶

Jordan

- Prime Minister Omar Razzaz, at a meeting organized by the Jordan Chamber of Industry, stressed the importance of the National Employment Pact and the importance of finding jobs for Jordanians in the industrial sector.⁷
- Turkey and Jordan signed a framework agreement for a joint economic committee to raise bilateral trade and boost economic cooperation.⁸

¹ Ahram, October 3, 2019, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/352118/Business/Economy/Egypt%E2%80%99s-bank-deposits-reach-EGP--trillion-CBE-gove.aspx>

² Washington Post, October 4, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/egypt-decreases-fuel-prices-for-the-first-time-in-decades/2019/10/03/7ae33b10-e616-11e9-b0a6-3d03721b85ef_story.html

³ Xinhuanet, Oct 7, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/08/c_138454362.htm

⁴ Ahram, Oct 8, 2019, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/352427/Business/Economy/Egypt,-France-ink-two-grant-agreements-worth-%E2%82%AC-mln.aspx>

⁵ Ahram, Oct 9, 2019, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/352514/Business/Economy/Egypt-improves-one-spot-to-th-rank-in--Global-Comp.aspx>

⁶ <http://www.cbe.org.eg/en/EconomicResearch/Statistics/Pages/ExchangeRatesListing.aspx>

⁷ En Ammon News, Oct 5, 2019, <http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleno=41693#.XZws9EYzZPY>

⁸ Daily Sabah, Oct 2, 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2019/10/02/turkey-jordan-establish-committee-to-boost-bilateral-trade>



- Jordan's government during this month, has finally reached a deal with the teachers' union to end a one-month strike, the longest public sector witnessed by Jordan. The strike had interrupted schooling for more than 1.5 million students.⁹
- According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Competitiveness Report 2019, Jordan was placed as the 7th most competitive Arab economy.¹⁰
- Jordan signed a deal with Lebanon to enhance agricultural cooperation. Both parties agreed to form technical committees to boost cooperation in this arena.¹¹
- 1.428 USD Jordanian official currency value.¹²

Iraq

- In a bid to decry corruption, unemployment and poor services, thousands of protesters clashed with riot police in Iraq's capital and across the south leaving several dead during the beginning of the month.¹³
- In a report published by Moody's, Iraq will likely not increase structural and fiscal reforms over the medium term due its dependence on oil revenues.¹⁴
- It is estimated that Iraq's economy lost 951 million USD during 7 days, after the Government had cut the internet as a result of the demonstrations¹⁵.
- The United States extends a waiver for another 120 days allowing Iraq to purchase gas and electricity from Iran.¹⁶

⁹ Reuters, Oct 6, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-jordan-strike-teachers/jordan-reaches-deal-with-teachers-union-to-end-one-month-strike-idUSKCN1WK0KQ>

¹⁰ Zawya, October 10, 2019,

https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/economy/story/Jordan_ranks_7th_most_competitive_Arab_economy_in_global_report-SNG_156049924/

¹¹ Zawya, October 13, 2019,

https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/economy/story/Jordan_Lebanon_ink_deal_to_boost_agricultural_cooperation-SNG_156809829/

¹² <http://statisticaldb.cbj.gov.jo/index?action=level4>

¹³ Business Times, Oct 4, 2019, <https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/government-economy/thousands-in-bloody-protests-across-iraq-31-dead>

¹⁴ The National, Oct 3, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/business/economy/iraq-s-dependence-on-oil-to-continue-as-reform-pace-slows-says-moody-s-1.918725>

¹⁵ Aawsat, October 16, 2019, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1947041/iraq-cut-internet-and-economy-suffered>

¹⁶ Reuters, October 16, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-iraq/us-extends-waiver-for-iraq-to-import-iranian-electricity-for-120-days-idUSKBN1WW2PS>



- The Iraqi government announced that they will be taking measures to combat corruption and quell protests. However, another demonstration was launched on the 25th of October.
- 539 Dinar /USD Iraqi official currency exchange rate.¹⁷

Lebanon

- During a time where there is an economic and monetary crisis (possible dollar shortage), Lebanon's central bank has made it easier for some importers to access dollars.¹⁸
- The Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture, the Italian Embassy in Lebanon, United Nations Industrial Development Organization hosted an event titled "Supporting Agro-industries: A Fundamental Choice for a Better Future," in Beirut. During the conference, strategies for commercial growth and social responsibility and the importance of the agricultural sector in Lebanon, were discussed.¹⁹
- The United Arab Emirates removed a travel flight ban to Lebanon as the Lebanese Government seeks help in saving the economy.²⁰
- Since banks are reluctant to issue dollars gas station owners conducted a strike to protest being forced to pay high rates from high-street currency exchanges.²¹
- In a move motivated by McKinsey International, the Lebanese Ministry of Industry announced the creation of 3850 job vacancies after cooperating with the Association of Industrialists.²²
- A massive demonstration was launched, involving around 2 million people who called for the resignation of the government and the implementation of reforms. The movement crippled the country for several days.²³
- 1507.5 LBP/ USD Lebanon official currency exchange rate.²⁴

¹⁷ <http://www.cbiraq.org/DataValues.aspx?dtFrm=10/31/2003&dtTo=02/18/2019&tmlD=175&dtformat=MMM,yyyy>

¹⁸ FT, Oct 2, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/3cc23068-e501-11e9-9743-db5a370481bc>

¹⁹ Daily Star, Oct 3, 2019, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Oct-03/492736-conference-highlights-vital-role-of-food-and-agriculture-in-lebanese-economy.ashx>

²⁰ Reuters, Oct 7, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy/uae-lifts-lebanon-travel-ban-as-beirut-seeks-support-for-ailing-economy-idUSKBN1WM0OC>

²¹ Daily Star, September 18, 2019, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Local/2019/Sep-18/491816-cars-queue-at-gas-stations-on-eve-of-strike-over-dollar-shortage.ashx>

²² Aawsat, October 14, 2019, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1944986/lebanon-mckinsey-recommendations-coupled-government-initiative-create-3850-job>

²³ 2323

²⁴ <http://www.bdl.gov.lb/>



Palestine

- The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and the Palestinian Monetary Authority published a report citing that Palestinian investments outside the country outweigh foreign investments in the country.²⁵
- Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and other officials at the invitation of his Egyptian counterpart Mustafa Madbouli, convened in Cairo to discuss ways of economic cooperation at various levels. This is intended to decrease the reliance of Palestine on Israel.²⁶
- Palestine's Monetary Authority adopted a new banking system which will enhance the transparency of financial transactions to avoid illegal business practices such as money laundering, corruption and terrorism financing.²⁷
- According to a recent study, Palestine's GDP growth is estimated to be 1.3% for 2019.²⁸

Syria

- A meeting was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Damascus, between Syria's Central Bank Governor, chairman of Damascus Chamber of Commerce, and several businessmen in an attempt to support the Syrian lira.²⁹
- The Central Bank of Syria has ordered a freeze on the bank accounts of Tarif Al-Akhras, one of the country's most powerful businessmen and a relative of Asma Al-Assad, as well as on those of several other prominent businessmen.³⁰
- The Central Bank sets a new exchange rate in a bid to press investors to sell their dollars and push Syrian businessmen to hand over their dollars as part of its drive to curb the depreciation of its currency.³¹
- To promote local production and reduce imports, the government is subsidized loans granted by Syrian banks to manufacturers.³²

²⁵ Al-Monitor, Oct 8, 2010, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/10/palestine-domestic-foreign-investments-leaving-pma-pcbs.html>

²⁶ Aawsat, October 9, 2019, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1937821/palestinian-egyptian-governments-meet-cairo-wednesday>

²⁷ Middle East Monitor, October 11, 2019, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20191011-pa-launches-new-anti-money-laundering-banking-system/>

²⁸ Relief Web, October 9, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/palestines-economic-update-october-2019-enar>

²⁹ Asharq Al-Awsat, Oct 1 2019, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1926396/syrian-regime-launches-campaign-against-businessmen-back-lira>

³⁰ <https://www.syria-report.com/>

³¹ <https://www.syria-report.com>

³² <https://www.syria-report.com>



- Iraq reopened its Qaim border-crossing with Syria on the 30th of September after eight years of closure.³³
- The General Organization of Tobacco expects this year's harvest to be lower than in 2018, while procurement prices remained broadly stable.³⁴
- Official Current Exchange Rate SP/USD: 435

Cyprus

- Turkey sent a ship to start drilling in Cyprus's exclusive economic zone, sparking tension between the two countries.³⁵
- The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report for 2019 has placed the country in the 44th position, maintaining its 2018 rank. ³⁶
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) downgraded its projections for the Cypriot economy due to low trade levels and weak production.³⁷
- Cypriot and Jordanian firms gathered in Nicosia for a two-day forum to explore investment opportunities in both countries.³⁸
- 1.126 USD Euro official currency value³⁹

³³ <https://www.syria-report.com>

³⁴ <https://www.syria-report.com>

³⁵ Ansamed, October 8, 2019,

http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/economics/2019/10/07/turkey-to-start-drilling-in-eni-licensed-area_ff1bba0-9a5d-4359-bcd3-6b20c6e4fba6.html

³⁶ Financial mirror, October 10, 2019, <https://www.financialmirror.com/news-details.php?nid=37675>

³⁷ In Cyprus, October 16, 2019, <https://in-cyprus.com/imf-projections-for-cyprus-economy-revised-downwards-as-part-of-global-economic-slowdown/>

³⁸ Cyprus-Mai, October 11, 2019, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/10/11/cypriot-jordanian-firms-to-explore-investment-opportunities/>

³⁹ https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-usd.en.html



3. THE REFUGEE SITUATION (Updated)

Egypt

- In October, several countries made several contributions for the sake of the UNHCR in Egypt. Denmark (\$3,663,004), Germany (\$2,469,543), UK (\$12,931,034), US (\$281,359), Liechtenstein (\$403,227), Netherlands (\$2,352,940), and the EU (\$109,410) were among the contributors.⁴⁰
- The UNHCR published a funding update detailing that 39% of 2019's financial requirements have been funded.⁴¹
- This month there has been a surge of reports of sexual assault on African refugee women in Cairo.⁴²

Jordan

The UNHCR states that there are currently 654,955 registered refugees in Jordan up until the beginning of October.

The proportion of Syrian displaced people registered within the UNHCR for October, are distributed as follows:

- 192,687 in Amman Governorate (29.4 %)
- 162,070 in Mafraq Governorate (24.8%)
- 135,096 in Irbid Governorate (20.6%)
- 94,620 in Zarqa Governorate (14.5%)
- 18,559 in Balqa Governorate (2.8%)
- 13,131 in Madaba Governorate (2%)
- 9,417 in Jarash Governorate (1.4%)
- 8,544 in Karak Governorate (1.3%)
- 8,192 in Maan Governorate (1.3%)
- 6,607 in Ajlun Governorate (1.0%)
- 3,515 in Aqaba Governorate (0.5%)
- 1,686 in Tafilah Governorate (0.3%)

⁴⁰ <http://reporting.unhcr.org/egypt>

⁴¹

<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Egypt%20Regional%20Office%20Funding%20Update%2008%20October%202019.pdf>

⁴² Middle East Monitor, October 18, 2019, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20191018-african-female-refugees-report-surge-of-sex-attacks-in-egypt/>



- Sharjah's Kalimat Foundation for Children's Empowerment, a charity from the UAE donated 20 libraries consisting of 2000 books for Syrian refugees in Jordan.⁴³
- The Ministry of Labor announced that up until October and since 2016, it has provided over 153,000 work permits for Syrian refugees.⁴⁴

Iraq

The UNHCR states that there are currently 228,573 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq.

The proportion of displaced Syrian people registered within the UNHCR up until the beginning of October, are distributed as follows:

- 118,081 in Erbil (51.4%)
 - 79,350 in Dahuk (34.6%)
 - 28,968 in Sulaymaniyah (12.6%)
 - 1,108 in Anbar (0.5%)
 - 1,778 in other areas (0.8%)⁴⁵
- OCHA, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, has released a report detailing that 56.8% of the funding requirements for 2019 in Iraq, has been funded.⁴⁶
 - During the World Mental Health Day, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Iraq raised awareness about suicide prevention.⁴⁷
 - Since Turkey started its operation in Syria, around 8,500 Syrian refugees crossed into Iraq, pushing several INGO's such as the Norwegian Refugee Council and Médecins Sans Frontières to respond to their needs.⁴⁸

⁴³ Gulf News, Oct 3, 2019, <https://gulfnews.com/uae/uae-charity-donates-2000-books-to-syrian-refugees-in-jordan-1.66877652>

⁴⁴ Jordan Times, Oct 7, 2019, <https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/syrian-refugees-issued-over-153000-work-permits>

⁴⁵ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5>

⁴⁶ Relief Web, October 4, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/msf-warns-mental-health-crisis-among-yazidis-iraq>

⁴⁷ Relief Web, Oct 10, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/suicide-prevention-key-component-iom-iraq-s-community-stabilization-portfolio-enarku>

⁴⁸ Relief Web, Oct 22, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/syrian-refugees-fleeing-iraq-ceasefire-about-expire-others-are-trapped-country>



Lebanon

Since the beginning of October, the number of registered refugees in Lebanon is 919,578.

Refugees in Lebanon are distributed as follows:

- 342,348 in Bekaa (37.2%)
 - 243,255 in North Lebanon (26.5%)
 - 228,529 in Beirut (24.9%)
 - 105,446 in South Lebanon (11.5%)⁴⁹
-
- UK MP and Minister for the Middle East Dr. Andrew Murrison, during his visit to Lebanon, announced that the UK will allocate £2 Million to assist Syrian children access quality education and create jobs for Syrian refugees.⁵⁰
 - The Refugee Rights Defenders Initiative group warned of the human rights violations Syrian refugees are facing in Lebanon.⁵¹
 - President Michel Aoun Convened with his Irish counterpart, President Michael Higgin at the Presidential palace in Baabda. Among the many topics discussed, President Aoun raised the issue of Syrian refugees.⁵²
 - Lebanese Labor Minister Camille Abou Sleiman called upon Syrian refugees to register their children within one year of their births.⁵³
 - 1,000 Syrian refugees returned from Lebanon to Syria on the 10th of October.

⁴⁹ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

⁵⁰ Relief Web, Oct 11, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/uk-aid-provide-education-and-jobs-thousands-syrian-refugees>

⁵¹ Daily Star, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Oct-08/493096-refugee-rights-group-warns-of-disastrous-human-rights-situation.ashx>

⁵² Nahar Net, October 15, 2019, <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/265715-aoun-meets-irish-counterpart-raises-refugees-file-israeli-violations>

⁵³ Xinhua Net, Oct. 4, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/04/c_138448418.htm



Syria

Northeastern Syria

- During The month of October, a new Sochi deal was established. Turkey and Russia agreed to jointly facilitate the return of refugees in a "safe and voluntary" manner.

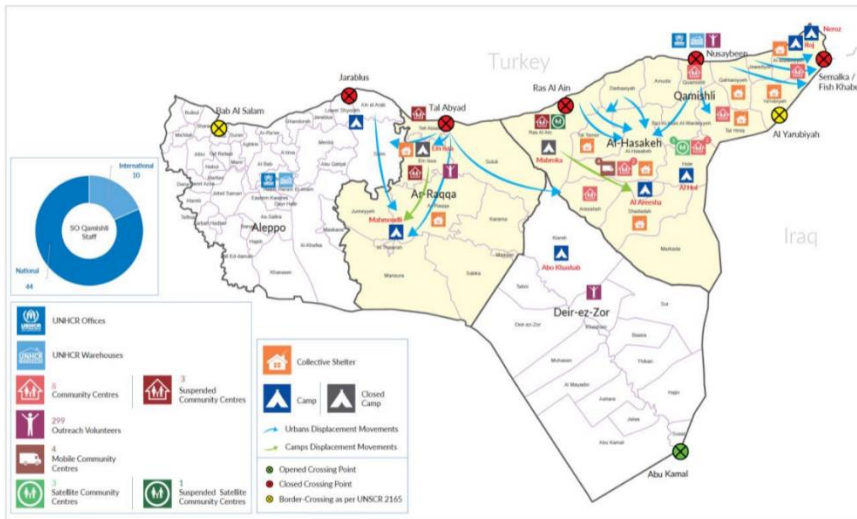
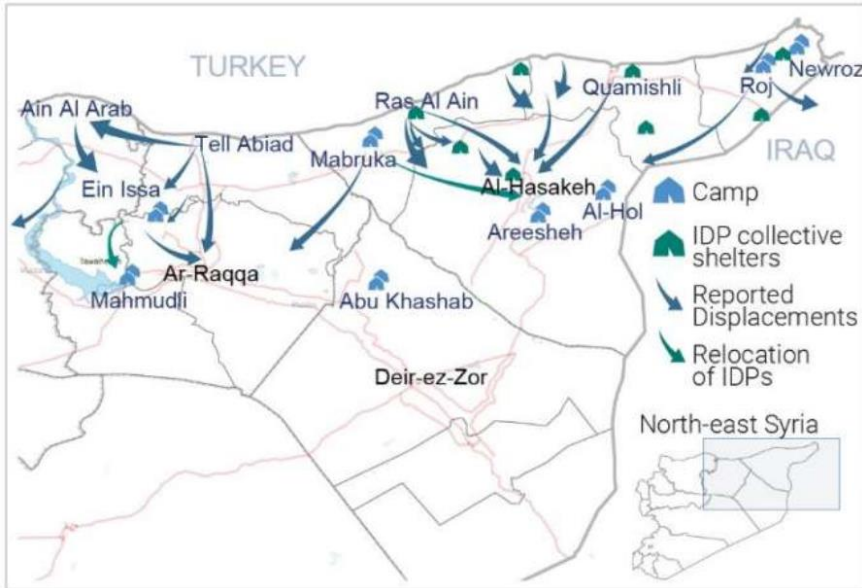
Humanitarian situation

According to OCHA, , the movement of a total of 195,011 people has been recorded across Al Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa and Aleppo governorates since military operations began on 9 October. Below are the pertaining updates:

- 152,011 people have been displaced from Al Hasakeh (96,088), Ar-Raqqa (39,463) & Aleppo governorates (16,460)
- 43,000 people have returned to their places of origin—18,000 to Al Hasakeh (8,500 to Qamishli & 9,500 to Al Malikeyyeh sub-districts) and 25,000 to Ar-Raqqa (18,000 to Tal Abyad and 7000 to Suluk sub-districts). Partners are providing services to displaced and host communities (including those returned)
- In Eastern Aleppo (areas out of Syrian government control) there is significantly reduced capacity to operate by cross border partners; staff departure or displacement has been the key factor disrupting activities.
- Of the 3 million people living in the north east, 1.8 million were already in need of some form of humanitarian assistance even before recent developments and 710,000 were displaced.
- Water infrastructure has been severely damaged by the fighting. As of 18 October, the main water station in Hasakeh governorate, serving 400,000 people, was out of service due to damages to the power grid.
- The protection situation of IDPs and the civilian population remains a critical concern and a permanent end to hostilities is needed. There are immediate concerns for the civilian population remaining in Tel Abyad, Ain Eissa, Tal Tamer, Ras al Ein and Malikiyah. Syrian army forces are deployed in Ain Al-Arab along the border with Turkey and further east in Malikiya.



Map of the Displacement movements:





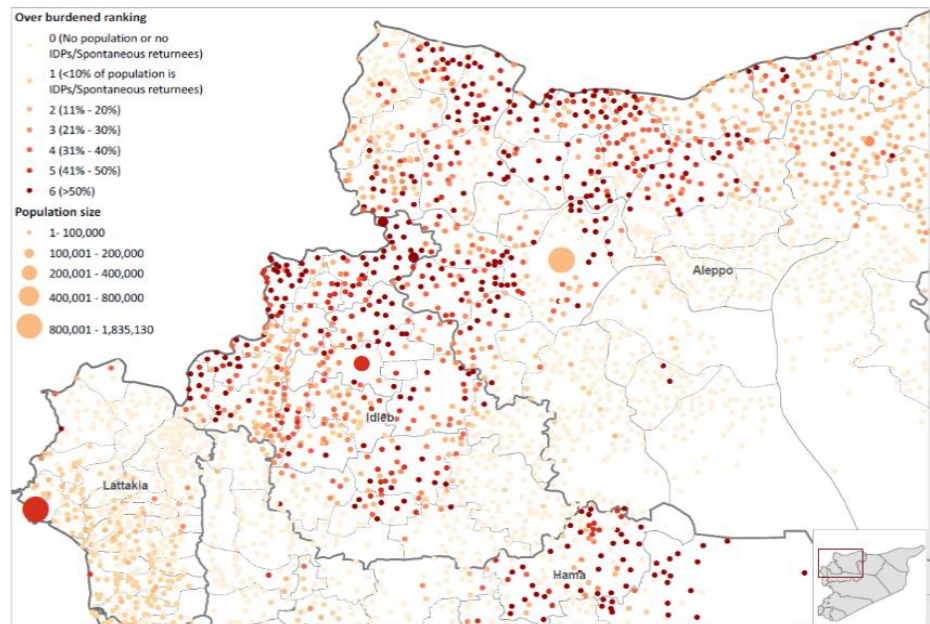
Northwestern Syria

As the Syria crisis enters its ninth year, the humanitarian situation for the four million people in living in northwest Syria, remains to be alarming.⁵⁴

Highlights

- 2 million Internally displaced people in northwest Syria
- 400,000 People displaced since 1 May
- 51% are children and 25% are women
- 2.7 million People in need of humanitarian assistance in northwest Syria.⁵⁵

While active fighting between GoS and NSAGs does not affect northern Aleppo governorate, frequent security incidents such as fighting between armed groups, kidnappings and IED incidents, negatively impact civilians and the operating environment for humanitarian partners and their ability to deliver. This is especially the case in Kaljibrin –A'zaz road, Ar-Ra'ee, Qabasin and Jarablus in northern Aleppo governorate.⁵⁶



The map reflects the density of IDPs/Spontaneous IDP returnees out of total population by community. Communities where more than 30% of the population are IDPs are called as over-burdened communities. Source: IDP/Pop TF
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

⁵⁴ OCHA, Situation Report No. 13-as of 8 October 2019

⁵⁵ OCHA, Situation Report No. 13

⁵⁶ OCHA, 8 Oct



Syrian Arab Republic

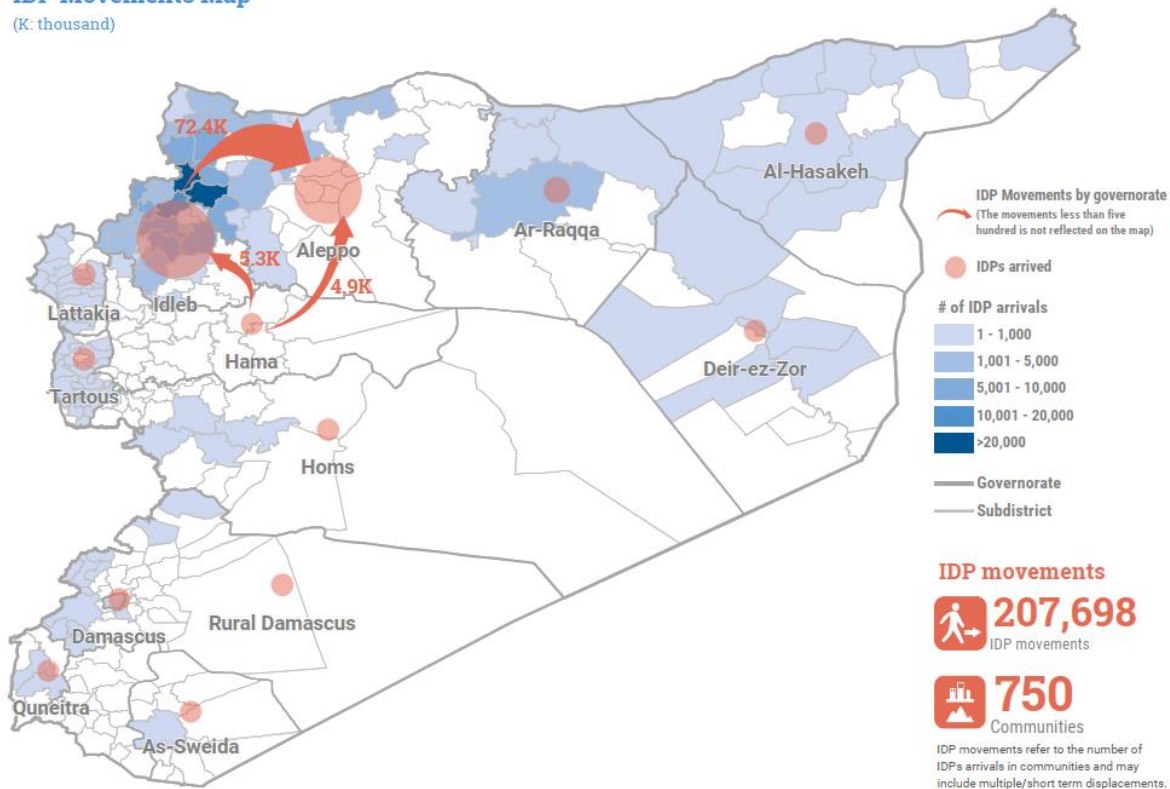
IDP Movements

August-2019



IDP Movements Map

(K: thousand)



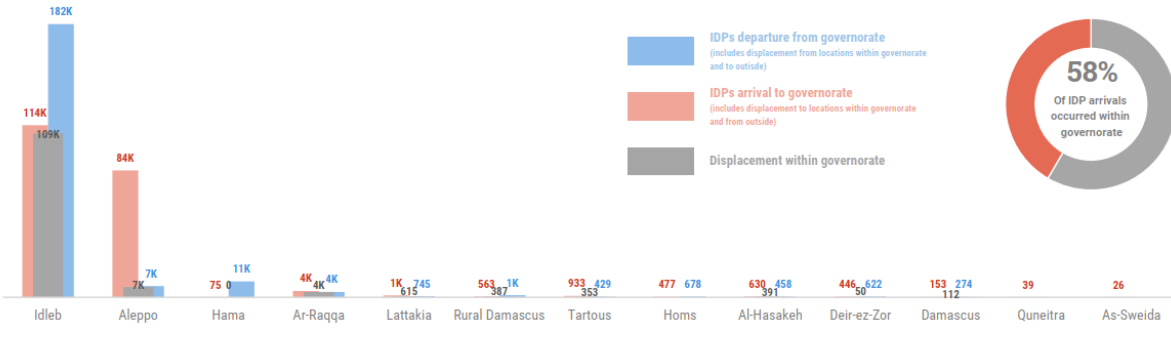
August 2019 updates- reported on 09 Oct 2019

During the month of August 2019, the humanitarian community tracked 207,669 IDPs displacement across Syria. The largest IDPs movement of 114,472 IDPs were in Idleb Governorate. The great majority of this was internal displacement within Idleb Governorate with about 109,016 IDPs, while about 5,277 IDPs were displaced from north Hama Governorate to north Idleb countryside. The second largest population movement was in Aleppo Governorate with 84,359 IDPs including 72,439 arriving from Idleb Governorate, 4,986 from north Hama Governorate and 6,835 with Aleppo Governorate. This displacement was due to high levels of conflict between the Government of Syria (GoS) and its allies and non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in south Idleb Governorate, north Hama Governorate, and west Aleppo Governorate. The third largest movement was tracked within Ar-Raqqa Governorate with a total 4,252 IDPs.



Governorate Summary

(K: thousand)



Creation Date: 09 Oct 2019

Source: Information as reported by CCCM, OCHA Syria and HNPAP for Aug 2019.

Feedback: siddiqik@un.org

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance.

Syrian Arab Republic

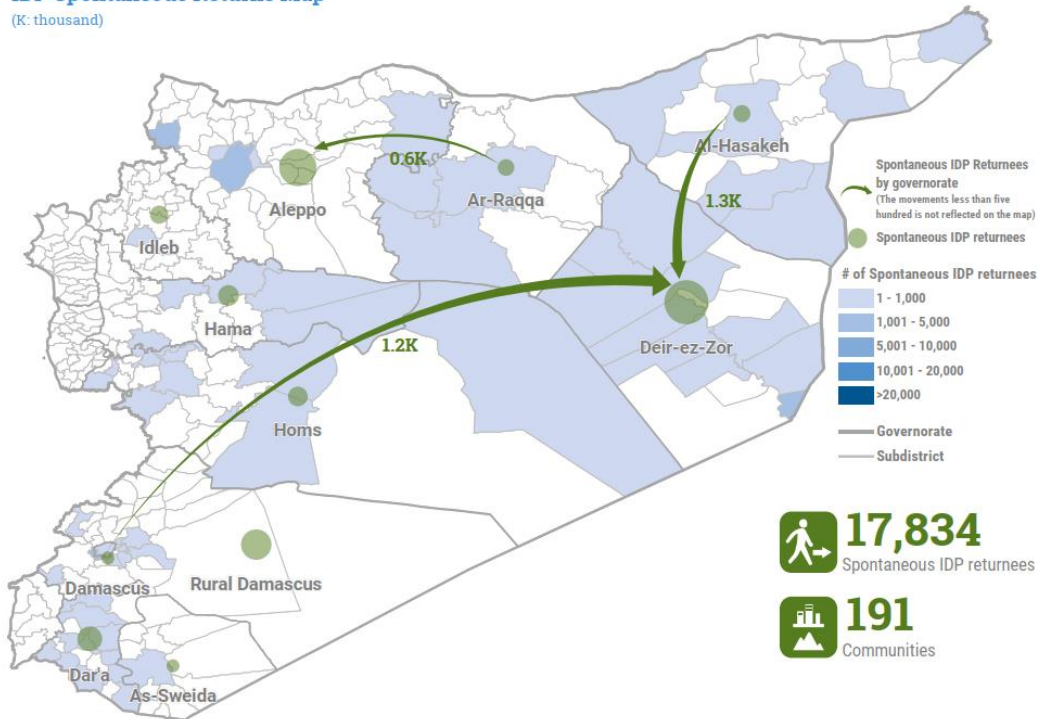
IDP Spontaneous returns

August-2019



IDP Spontaneous Returns Map

(K: thousand)



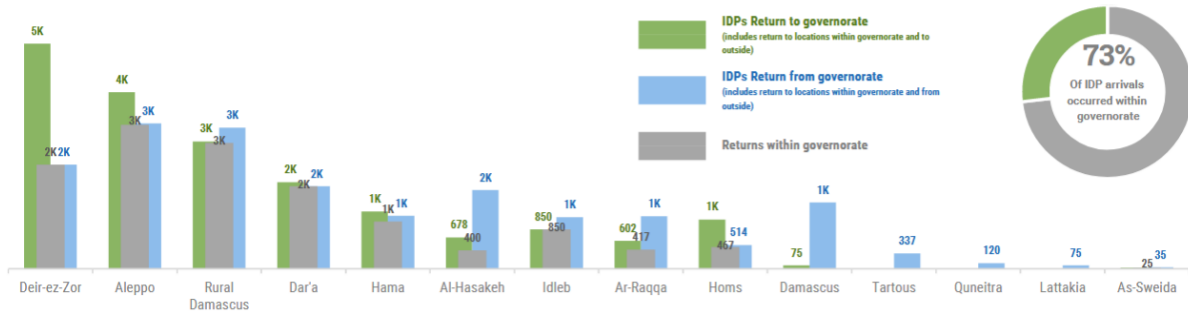


August 2019 updates- reported on 09 Oct 2019

During the month of August 2019, the humanitarian community tracked 17,834 spontaneous IDP returnees in several areas across Syria. The largest of these returns were tracked in Deir-El-Zor Governorate with 4,862 returnees, about 2,250 of whom returned from within the Governorate, 1,300 from Al-Hasakeh Governorate and 1,240 from Damascus Governorate. Aleppo Governorate received the second largest number of IDP returnees with 3,812 spontaneous returns, the majority of whom returned from within the Governorate with 3,112 returnees and 560 returnees from Ar-Raqqa Governorate, followed by Rural Damascus with 2,751 tracked spontaneous returns.

Governorate Summary

(K: thousand)



Creation Date: 09 Oct 2019
Feedback: siddiqik@un.org

Source: Information as reported by CCCM, OCHA Syria and HNAP for Aug 2019.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance.



Cyprus

- Constantinos Petrides, the Cypriot Interior Minister, voiced his concern about the high probability of Jihadists infiltrating Cyprus during Syrian migratory waves.⁵⁷
- Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, conveyed to reporters in Brussels that Cyprus might not be able to extend the EU-Turkey deal concerning refugees.⁵⁸
- In preparation for supporting the Kophinou Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers and the temporary shelter Pournara in Kokkinotrimithia, Phileleftheros, the interior ministry is budgeting 1 million euros for next year.⁵⁹
- 20 Syrian refugees were rescued off the Cypriot coast on the 5th of October.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Cyprus, October 16, 2019, <https://in-cyprus.com/cyprus-fears-jihadists-may-mix-with-rising-number-of-syrian-refugees-coming-over/>

⁵⁸ Cyprus Mail, October 16, 2019, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/10/16/difficult-to-extend-eu-turkey-refugee-deal-to-cyprus/>

⁵⁹ In Cyprus, October 18, 2019, <https://in-cyprus.com/e1m-for-reception-facilities-for-refugees/>

⁶⁰ Cyprus-Mail, October 5, 2019, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/10/05/20-refugees-rescued-off-cape-greco/>



4. CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Egypt

- The Coptic Orthodox Church, under the guidance of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Holy See of St. Mark, is in the process of establishing of a new monastery for nuns in Australia. The new monastery is currently under construction in the Laura district of Sydney.⁶¹
- His Holiness Pope Tawadros II travelled to Paris in a trip first of its kind, to meet President Emanuel Macron, the Coptic Orthodox Church's parish priests, and various French diplomats.⁶²
- His Holiness Pope Tawadros II at the papal headquarters in Katsia, received a delegation headed by Father Elias Gharios, from the Lebanese Maronite Church. The two sides discussed the excellent relationship which exists between the Egyptian and Lebanese Church.⁶³
- His Holiness Pope Tawadros II received Papal Ambassador Archbishop Bruno Mozaro, to bid him farewell on the occasion of the end of his tenure.⁶⁴

Jordan

- The "House of Wisdom" was opened in a building belonging to the Baptist Church in Jordan, to tend to the needs of the elderly.⁶⁵

Iraq

- His Holiness Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans and head of the Chaldean Catholic Church during an interview, called upon Iraqi Christians to "deepen their vocation, pray, reflect on the call to the priesthood, to consecrated life also for the laity" because the strength of the Church "depends largely on this". His statement came during the extraordinary missionary month, launched by Pope Francis.⁶⁶
- The Chaldean Patriarchate of Iraq called for prayer for the stability of the country called on everyone to shoulder their national and moral responsibilities, to unite to avoid sliding the country into an unknown

⁶¹ Ahram, October 1, 2019, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/351932/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-Coptic-Orthodox-Church-to-establish-new-mon.aspx>

⁶² Elbalad, October 9, 2019, <https://www.elbalad.news/4011959>

⁶³ Elbalad, October 8, 2019, <https://www.elbalad.news/4010865>

⁶⁴ Akhbarelyom, October 8, 2019, <https://akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails/2924948/1/>

⁶⁵ Menafn, October 2, 2019, <https://menafn.com/arabic/1099080835/>

⁶⁶ Asian News, October 3, 2019, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Card-Sako,-Missionary-month:-an-opportunity-to-reflect-on-vocation-48170.html>



fate, and to speed up the handling of the situation, especially corruption, unemployment and deterioration of services.⁶⁷

Lebanon

- His Holiness Patriarch John X, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, presided over the Antioch Council held at Balamand during its eleventh regular session. During the meeting, the issues of the kidnapped Bishops of Aleppo and the challenges facing the Greek Orthodox Church were discussed. In the final statement, the Fathers welcomed the initiatives aimed at finding a political solution to the years-long crisis in Syria, which respects the unity of the state and respects the rights and aspirations of the Syrian people. They called on the world to look at the magnitude of the human tragedy that the people are suffering from, as a result of the scourge of war and economic blockade. They called for serious actions to lift the sanctions imposed on Syria, which the citizens bear the burden, and to provide the conditions for the return of displaced people, forced migrants and refugees. They also urged all people to work towards national reconciliation and courageously contribute to solutions that provide security, peace, cohesion and stability and pave the way for growth, progress and prosperity. They also expressed their condemnation of any aggression targeting Syrian sovereignty and the exposing of its people to death, displacement and forced migration. Fathers also called on the Lebanese government to take all steps that would contribute to addressing the difficult economic situation, alleviate the burdens on citizens and avoid imposing more taxes on low-income people. They appealed to all Lebanese officials to put an end to the rampant corruption in state institutions and administrations that affects all spheres of life and threatens the collapse of the state. Moreover, the Fathers of the Council stressed the importance of promoting political practice above personal interests and considerations, and to cleanse the public administrations of corrupt people. They also welcomed the initiative of the Council of Ministers to fill vacancies in public office, stressing the need to stay away from clientelism. Furthermore, they claimed that it is imperative to adopt transparency in recruitment and to ensure the competence and expertise of candidates, in full respect for sectarian distribution and not favoring one sect over another. The fathers stopped at the so-called “deal of the century” that is being marketed in the region. They stressed that the Palestinian cause is the cause of a people whose most basic rights are violated daily and are subjected to the most horrible racial discrimination by an occupying power. They called on all countries of the world to work for the establishment of a Palestinian state and the implementation of international resolutions on the right of return, stressing that any solution to the Palestinian issue outside the framework of justice and guaranteed rights of the Palestinian people, remains unjust and unacceptable. The Fathers prayed for Iraq and for all the peoples

⁶⁷Gilgamesh Press, October 9, 2019, <https://glgamesh.com/archives/113003>



and countries of the region, and they asked God to enlighten the minds of those responsible for the fate of the world and the region, so that they could sympathize with human beings and take the initiative to make the world more peaceful and just without conflicts, violence, greed, polarization and divisions. The fathers also discussed the growing environmental crisis due to the continued pollution and the indiscriminate exploitation of the earth's goods. Noting that this crisis is threatening nature and life, including human life, they called for courageous decisions that respect the environment, reduce the greed of consumption, domination of nature, and seeking quick and easy profit. They also called for the formulation of policies that guarantee the prospects for future life and contribute to the preservation of what allows future generations to enjoy the benefits of the earth.

- In a historical event, The Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi travelled to Accra, Ghana where he was greeted by the Lebanese ambassador, Archbishop Simon and various clergy men.⁶⁸
- During a ceremonial mass, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi, denounced the torture being executed at the hands of security services and the failure of the judicial system to implement laws.⁶⁹
- Patriarch Youssef el Absi, The Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, during his visit to Argentine prayed with Bishop Ibrahim for the sake of the souls of all the dead of the Greek Catholic diaspora in the country.⁷⁰
- An emergency Catholic Bishops meeting was held at Bkerki. It was presided by Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi and was attended by the Patriarchs and Bishops of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Participants included Patriarch of the Melkite Roman Catholic Church Joseph Absi, Patriarch of the Armenian Orthodox Church Catholicos Aram I Kechichian, Armenian Catholic Patriarch Gregory Gebroyan, Head of the Evangelical Sect Joseph Kassab, Catholic Patriarch Ignatius III Yonan, Beirut Metropolitan Orthodox Archbishop Elias Audi, Bishop Hanna Rahmeh, and other Church leaders. Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi expressed the joint statement of the meeting claiming that Bkerki endorses the demonstrations demands the government to resign, and to heed the demands of demonstrators and the Lebanese people.⁷¹
- Beirut Metropolitan Orthodox Archbishop Elias Audi during his attendance the meeting of Bkerki demanded the government to resign.⁷²

⁶⁸ An nahar, October 10, 2019 <https://www.annahar.com/article/1046484->

⁶⁹ LBC, October 6, 2019, <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/d/lebanon/473628/>

⁷⁰ Akhbarelyom, October 2, 2019, <https://akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails/2921951/1>

⁷¹ Lebanon 24, October 24, 2019, <https://www.lebanon24.com/news/lebanon/638358>

⁷² Lebanon 24, October 23, 2019, <https://www.lebanon24.com/news/lebanon/638093>



Palestine

- His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem and Minister Dr. Ramzi Khoury, Director General of the National Fund for the Presidency of the Higher Committee of Churches, received Ambassador Issa Kassisia the Palestinian Ambassador stationed at the Vatican. The importance of the meeting is to strengthen relations between the parishioners and the Patriarchate for to protect the endowments and preserve the historical and legal status of the Holy City.⁷³
- Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sebastian Greek Orthodox, expressed his solidarity with the Palestinian people in their ordeal by rejecting Israel's actions of destroying people's houses and belongings.⁷⁴

Syria

- Since a new Church will be built in Latakia, Patriarch Mar Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of the Syriac Orthodox, visited the land on which it will be built. He was updated about the ongoing work and the plans designed by the architects and engineers for the project.⁷⁵
- His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II received a Delegation from the Coptic Orthodox Church at the Patriarchal Residence in Atchaneh – Lebanon, in which it informed about its efforts to support Oriental Orthodox Churches. The delegation included their Eminences: Anba Thomas, Bishop of Al-Qusiyya and Mir, and Anba Angelos, General Bishop of the Churches in Northern Shubra, as well as Dr. Guirguiss Saleh, Honorary General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches. The meeting was attended by their Eminences: Mor Theophilos Georges Saliba, Archbishop of Mount Lebanon and Tripoli, Mor Clemis Daniel Kourieh, Archbishop of Beirut, and Very Rev. Raban Joseph Bali, Patriarchal Secretary and Media Office Director.⁷⁶
- The Syriac Catholic Church, during a mass held on the 13th of October, pleaded for the immediate and lasting peace in Northern Syria and the preservation of human lives, especially the Christian ones.⁷⁷

⁷³ Ammon News, October 3, 2019, <https://www.ammonnews.net/article/488798>

⁷⁴ Albawah News, October 8, 2019, <https://www.albawabhnews.com/3755827>

⁷⁵ Syriac Patriarchate, October 10, 2019, Syriac Patriarchate, <https://syriacpatriarchate.org/2019/10/inspection-of-church-land-in-lattaqia/>

⁷⁶ Syriac Patriarchate, October 14, 2019, <https://syriacpatriarchate.org/2019/10/visit-of-a-coptic-delegation/>

⁷⁷ Crux Now, Oct 13, 2019, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-middle-east/2019/10/14/syriac-catholic-patriarch-pleads-for-peace-in-northeastern-syria/>



Cyprus

- In a bid to establish harmony between the Church and the LGBT community in Cyprus, it was decided to hold a workshop next month, titled 'Church and LGBTI People: Opportunities for Mutual Understanding and Coexistence'.⁷⁸

5. MECC HEADQUARTERS ACTIVITIES

PCUSA Visits MECC HO (October 9)

A delegation from the United States Presbyterian Evangelical Church- PCUSA, national leadership, visited the headquarters of the Middle East Council of Churches in Beirut on the 9th of October, and met with a number of directors of departments and programs in the Council.



PCUSA during a meeting with MECC directors, October 9, 2019, Photo Credit: MECC website

⁷⁸Cyprus Mail, Oct 17, 2019, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/10/17/lgbti-community-does-not-want-war-with-the-church-seeks-coexistence/>



The visit comes within the framework of a tour to the Middle East accompanied by the Regional Liaison to Iraq, Syria and Lebanon Rev. El Marie Parker, to discuss the long march of cooperation between the American Evangelical Church and the Council and ways of developing it in line with the needs of the Churches of the Middle East. They emphasized respective roles of each person in relief work in the region and their roles in the recently revived unit of the Theological and Ecumenical Department for interfaith and citizenship work.

MECC at the Magi Initiative Conference (October 10-12)

In cooperation with the Middle East Council of Churches, the Bible Society of Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, and the British Bible Society held a dialogue conference under the Magi Initiative: East↔ West, titled "During Difficult Times ... Christians Together Listening to the Word of God", between 10 and 12 October in Bet Anya - Harissa, Lebanon.



Attendees of the Magi Initiative Conference, Oct 12, 2019, Photo Credit: MECC website



The opening session, attended by spiritual leaders from the various churches, started with a speech by the Secretary General of the Bible Society Mike Bassos. He announced the birth of the Magi Initiative: East ↔ West in an attempt to launch a dialogue between Churches in the East and West. He claimed that "Whenever we meet a Church leader in Lebanon and around the world, we hear the same concerns about how to meet the challenges so that the Church remains a cornerstone of society and contributes to its growth and prosperity.

Afterwards, the Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches Dr Souraya Bechealany delivered a speech in which she considered the meeting as a token of the ecclesiastical communion (*koinônia*) and the embodiment of the one Apostolic Holy and Unifying Church, and a station for prayer, reflection and working together on the meaning of the Christian presence in this East, in the light of the Word of God. She added "Come, as the Magi, put ourselves in a state of listening to the Holy Spirit and in anticipation of the light of the star to guide us to where Christ is born to come and worship Him. Yes, we in this East, despite the darkness falling upon us, march towards Christ under the light of His Word and in the glory of His resurrection. He is born every day in all parts of the east and in the silent believing souls. "

As for the head of the British Bible Society Anba Angelos, he declared in his speech that despite all the complexities facing the Church in the world, our ecclesiastical work requires the courage to break down barriers to be stronger than the reality of this world in which we live and move forward. He added, "Our Church is required to face this changing reality and this meeting today is not an attempt to monopolize or impose a certain authority and dictate ideas. It is a meeting of true fraternity. We are called to unite with our one message that brings us together, so that the ties remain solid and strong no matter how many differences."

For his part, the Pontifical Ambassador to Lebanon, Monsignor Joseph Spitry, affirmed the great interest of the Pontiff in promoting peace building in the Middle East. Afterwards, came the letter of Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, "I take part in the opening session of your conference, and I am very pleased, bringing to you the greetings of the Pontiff and his honor to represent him today, who hopes that these meetings in the precious Middle East will contribute to building peace and sowing love."

The session concluded with a lecture by His Holiness Catholicos Aram I Keshichian on the Bible and the one Church of Christ in the East and the West. He stated that "Christianity is based on the Bible, from which we draw knowledge on how to be Christians and a Church. Christian unity is a challenge and is more urgent in the Middle East than all other parts of the world. The fact that Christianity remains here is shaken by the growing emigration of Christians for legitimate reasons. Achieving Christian unity is a challenge which is more needed in the Middle East than other parts of the world. Christianity here remains shaken by the growing emigration of Christians for legitimate reasons. The commandment of Christ "love your neighbor" has been taken seriously by the Churches of the Middle East. Muslim-Christian coexistence on the basis of



mutual acceptance is a concrete manifestation of the spirit of tolerance that has characterized our Churches over the centuries. Increasing violence and extremism make the Bible's message of love, tolerance and mutual respect more urgent. ”

On the second and third day, participants from different Eastern and Western churches held specialized workshops, discussing the pressures on Christian communities and the opportunities under the title "Christian Communities in Difficult Times," as part of a biblical and practical outlook on sustained biblical engagement with case studies from the Middle East and Western Europe.

WCC visits MECC HO (October 14)



Marianne Ejdersten, the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Communication Director visited the MECC HO in Beirut. The point of this meeting was to solidify collaboration in the field of serving the Peace Building and Human Dignity, exchange ecumenical legacy, and enhance cooperation on various levels.

Marianne Ejder with Mrs. Huguette Salameh, Head of the Communications Department, Dr. Souraya Bechealany, and Mr. Ziad El Sayegh, Policies and Communication Advisor of MECC, October 14, 2019, Photo Credits: MECC website.



6. MECC Humanitarian activities October 2019

Lebanon

- Conducted 40 hours of training on Home Care for the elderly in Mount Lebanon, Beirut and Koura – Northern Lebanon. 60 women including Lebanese citizens, and Syrian/Iraqi Refugees participated in the event.
- Held 16 Health Awareness Sessions for 156 women which were divided among workshops bearing topics such as mental health, psychosocial wellbeing, dealing with Anxiety, and vaccination.
- Provided 221 women with MHPSS and GBV resilience activities through 20 sessions of drama therapy.
- Conducted 8 sessions of PSS for 24 children.
- Conducted 4 sessions for 24 children addressing the following topics: Relieving stress through sports games and gardening, expressing emotions through mask of emotions and tambourine game, healing trauma through marionette & modeling clay, and arts and crafts.
- Launched family counselling sessions for 4 families. Each family sat for 3 in-depth sessions with a MECC family mediator.
- Conducted GBV sessions for 51 women and 29 men examining topics such as bullying, types of violence and how does society look at GBV.
- Held recreational sessions in which 39 women from Mount Lebanon took a trip to the Bekaa governorate. Women enrolled in various projects in Mount Lebanon (Sad el Bauchrieh and Naba'a) had the chance to visit various sites, which included religious monasteries and were allowed to learn about the agricultural approach to the winery business.
- Arranged 22 handicraft training sessions for 35 women in South Lebanon. Also self-care sessions took place to instruct them on how to take care of themselves in the house, and how to take care of their face, hands, hair, and teeth.
- Launched 5 life skills sessions targeting 100 women in Hadatha, South Lebanon to discuss communication skills, parenting skills, budget management and priorities identification.
- Launched 3 awareness sessions targeting 112 women in Tebnin and Hadatha, South Lebanon to discuss mental health and PSS well-being.
- Completed 4 full day workshops in Social Cohesion in the North of Lebanon – Akkar area under the title of "Moving Towards a Cohesive Society", and in cooperation with the Orthodox Youth Movement. Workshops were conducted with some 30 Syrian and Lebanese youth (25-30 years old), 15 of each nationality. They revolved around Communication Skills, Social Cohesion, Social Entrepreneurship, Design Thinking, Project Management, finding common denominators, and eradicating misconceptions towards one another.



Home Care Session, October, 2019, Photo Credit: Diakonia



Visit to the Bekaa area (recreational session), October, 2019, Photo Credit: Diakonia



Group GBC Session, October 2019, Photo Credit: Diakonia



Children PSS Session, October 2019, Photo Credit: Diakonia



PSS session with women, October 2019, Photo Credit: Diakonia



GBV session for men, October, 2019, Photo Credit: Diakonia



Social Cohesion Session, October 2019, Photo Credit: Diakonia



Syria

- Completed vocational training activities for 80 trainees in Maarba and Daraa AlBalad.
- Completed business startup courses for 100 skilled workers in Maarba and Daraa AlBalad.
- Continued distribution of 200 startup kits for 200 youth in AlTal and Izraa.
- Completed crochet training course for 46 women in AlTal and Izraa.
- Continued rehabilitation of six public schools in Kherbet Ghazaleh and Daraa AlBalad.
- Launched vocational training and grants project in Aleppo.
- Launched remedial classes for 250 students in Lattakia.
- Launched rehabilitation of two medical centers in Damascus rural.
- Prepared to launch waste management activities in Erbin in Damascus rural.
- Prepared to launch loan project with skilled workers.
- Completed the tender process to purchase 1800 winter adult jackets and 3596 winter clothing kits for children. They are to be distributed in Toha and Mal villages in Daraa governorate.



Crochet training course for 46 women in Al Tal(Rural Damascus) and in Izraa (South of Syria), Oct 2019, Photo Credit: Diakonia Syria



Vocational training for 80 youths in Dar'a (South of Syria), Oct 2019, Photo Credit: Diakonia Syria

7. CONCLUSION

As new armed struggles continue to shape our region and deteriorating socioeconomic conditions slap pressure on ME populations, a plethora of outcomes can emanate. Therefore, it is up to organizations and Churches to form proactive policies and to be prepared to act pragmatically. The MECC employs such methodology and therefore has been successful in reaching a wide scope of beneficiaries. Therefore, the council will continue to use such an approach while evolving its internal mechanism, hoping that it will enhance its effectiveness in dealing with whatever is coming.