

## **Refugee Policy Governance after Conflict and Crisis – Towards an Arab Regional Approach?**

Abstract for Doha Institute Conference: Governance of Public Policies During and After Conflicts in the Middle East

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### ***Abstract***

The decade after the Arab uprisings unfolded with tragic conflicts in Syria, Libya, Yemen and elsewhere that produced the largest crisis in refugees and internally displaced people (IDP) since World War II. In addition, recent years have seen other conflict in the region, including notably the boycott of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and others. With the latter resolved recently, the ongoing challenge of the Arab refugee crisis could be an area for refocused regional policy and governance collaboration, now that such collaboration is again plausible.

A regional approach to the Syrian and broader Middle Eastern refugee and IDP crisis is particularly compelling as a policy goal for several reasons. First, the international refugee legal and governance regime was severely challenged by the Syrian and Yemeni wars, as well as refugee problems in Latin America. A growing group of experts, such as Oxford professors Betts and Collier, wonder whether contemporary refugee law and governance are even salvageable today. Second, and related to this, Europe and the US have mostly shut the door on admitting refugees from Arab countries into their countries in the past few years, even before the COVID pandemic. Third, Arab states, particularly those of the GCC, have shown appreciation for the impact that millions of refugees in the MENA have on the region and their own societies; they donated substantial financial and infrastructural aid to refugees and refugee camps, and admitted some refugees from Syria and elsewhere, despite mostly not being parties to the two major refugee treaties. Indeed, Qatar has been particularly important in recent years in enacting the first significant refugee national legislation in the GCC in 2018.

Given the imperatives of addressing the numbers of refugees and IDP's in the MENA, and the possible connection of the refugee issue to broader issues of political stability and regional geopolitics, what are the prospects for a MENA Arab regional approach to refugee governance? Despite the historical surfeit of successes with respect to Arab regionalism, this paper argues that the regional nature of Arab economic interaction, the longstanding GCC experience of regulating diverse populations, and the existence of quasi-autonomous refugee zones could be seeds of a regionalized approach to Arab refugee and IDP governance. Specifically, a combination of more robust refugee status in some Arab countries, such as Qatar, and significant economic aid, improvement of conditions, and prospects for autonomy and upward mobility from, existing refugee zones that exist in Jordan, Lebanon and elsewhere, offer a template for regional refugee governance that could also enhance broader GCC policy collaboration. The paper details the need and logic behind a regional GCC-led Arab refugee governance scheme, analyzes the specific regional and international actors relevant to such a scheme, and discusses the political prospects and challenges for its realization.

This paper comes out of a \$35,000 World Universities Network pilot grant I have this year to work with a global group of scholars, including a colleague in Qatar, on regional approaches to refugee governance. It builds on my training as a lawyer, political scientist and policy scholar. It also connects to prior work I have done on the policy and legal regulation of migrant populations in the GCC on a grant from Georgetown SFS-Qatar, and on the meanings and policy implications of the rule of law in Qatar and the GCC on a \$1 million grant from the QNRF (2013-6).