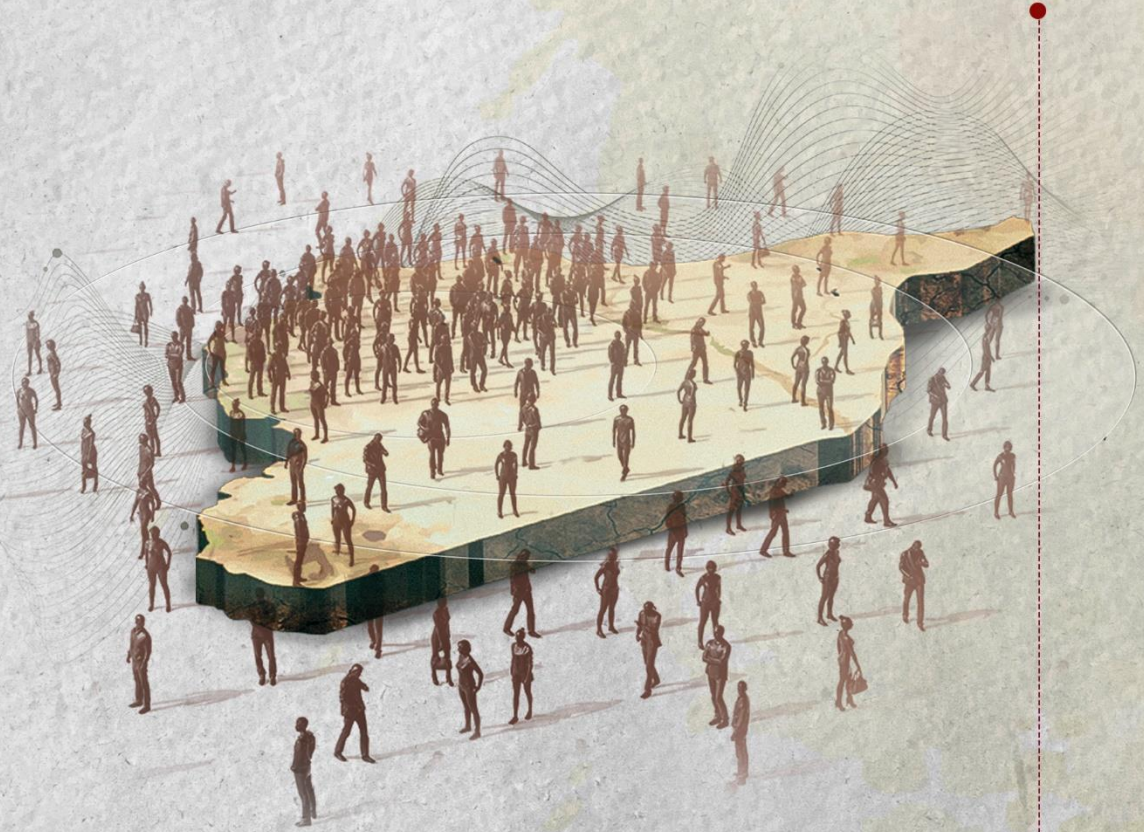




جسور للدراسات
JUSOOR FOR STUDIES

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Analytical Maps

Map of the distribution of Syrians inside and outside Syria

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We are an independent research institution and a think tank specialized in information management, preparation of political, economic, and social studies and research. We are also interested in activities, events, and training to create mutual influence between officials, decision makers and all circles of influence and opinion at the local, regional and international levels. We also target all state specializations and development sectors related to the Syrian issue, to help reaching the goals and strategies through data, ideas and recommendations in a professional, realistic and accurate manner.

Introduction:

The need for a reissuance of new population estimates for Syria has emerged due to recent international developments, especially the earthquake that struck southern Turkey and northern Syria. This event has led to new demographic shifts, with Syrians being the most affected as refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). With Turkey tightening its policies towards refugees and encouraging them to return to northern Syria, large numbers of people have moved north at different times. It is estimated that approximately 600,000 Syrians, at the very least, have returned in the past three years.¹

Furthermore, international developments and natural changes have contributed to reshaping the population landscape in Syria. In addition to the various transformations accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic itself has led thousands to leave their host regions in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, either heading west or returning to Syria. Inflationary waves, especially in Turkey, where the devastating earthquake occurred, and the financial crisis that Lebanon has been experiencing since 2019, along with the political events there, have also impacted the overall number of displaced individuals in those areas.²

As of the end of the first quarter of 2023, the total number of Syrians reached approximately 26.7 million people, with around 16.76 million residing inside Syria and approximately 9.12 million residing outside Syria. There are also 897,000 individuals who are missing or unaccounted for.

The Syrian population within Syria is distributed among opposition-controlled areas, where there are approximately 4.3 million people, areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), with approximately 2.6 million people, and areas controlled by the government, with approximately 9.6 million people.

¹Turkish President: Up until today, around 500,000 Syrian refugees have returned to the areas that we have transformed into safe zones. (Anadolu Agency, 11/01/2023) [Link](#).

² The number of Syrians returning from Turkey to their country following the earthquake has risen to 40,000. (Syria TV, 28/02/2023) [Link](#).

The methodology of work:

Obtaining population figures in Syria at present is extremely challenging, particularly due to the Central Bureau of Statistics' discontinuation of work since 2012 and the lack of issued data regarding the population, economic, and social situation in Syria. This makes it difficult to maintain an accurate population estimate, assuming that population growth is natural based on birth and death rates under normal circumstances.³

The Central Bureau of Statistics was the sole official entity capable of monitoring population shifts in Syria, thanks to its technical and statistical capabilities. The disruption of its operations has led to a data crisis in Syria, resulting in the emergence of hundreds of small organizations working in various specialties. However, these organizations can, at best, provide reliable or semi-reliable statistics within their respective areas of expertise.

Population movements have been the most prominent transformation in the overall picture that has been evolving over the past 13 years. Such movements have caused profound changes and significant impacts that go beyond mere individuals transitioning from one place to another or their disappearance. Births, marriages, citizenship, migration, displacement, disappearance, and detention have introduced broader dimensions to the population calculation equation.

In this regard, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have experienced displacement more than three times, while millions have ended up outside the country. These numbers have been subject to continuous developments due to the policies of host countries, as well as military shifts, security conditions, and economic circumstances within Syria.

All of this complicates the task of creating estimates that closely reflect the Syrian demographic reality. Despite this fact, however, dozens of Syrian and non-Syrian institutions have contributed to monitoring displacement and migration, as well as tracking the numbers of casualties, detainees, and missing persons. Some of these institutions have even compiled name lists detailing the numbers of missing and deceased individuals. Humanitarian organizations have played a significant role in mapping the distribution in northeastern and northwestern Syria. Moreover, numerous local teams have conducted studies on food, consumption, and internal trade in areas under government control. These efforts create opportunities to overcome the obstacles that hinder the development of accurate Syrian population estimates. landscape, migration, security, and other related matters that directly or indirectly impact debates on the population figures. As a result, they have built a solid database in these areas.

³ The statistics issued by the Central Bureau of Statistics in Syria indicates that the population is estimated to be 28.1 million. It is worth noting that the latest population census conducted was in 2014, which was a highly complex period.

Elements that complicated the process of calculating population numbers, and others that facilitated it

Reasons that complicate estimating the number of Syrians	Variables that facilitate estimating the number of Syrians
Interruption of the work of the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics	The spread of civil society organizations specialized in separate humanitarian issues and carrying out daily field work
The movement of displacement and asylum is accelerating and multiplying	The entry of international institutions into Syria, and their issuance of situation assessment reports, assessment of needs, and follow-up of the displacement movement
The heterogeneity of the legal status of Syrian refugees in countries of asylum	The distribution of Syrians in neighboring countries and countries of the world, which entrusted the task of statistics to the statistical agencies and institutions in these countries
Newborns from naturalized families whose status is difficult to know in official statistics	The spread of institutions documenting the Syrian situation, such as documenting the names of detainees, the disappeared, the dead, and other issues
Disappearance, enforced disappearance, and detention	Attempts to institutionalize the civil registry in northern Syria and other regions
Problems of recent births in areas of displacement and asylum, and the loss of legal documents	Continuing attempts by experts to estimate population numbers



Jusoor Center for Studies has been actively monitoring transformations in the Syrian economic situation, internal trade issues, the Syrian population.

Jusoor Center acknowledges that many of the figures it relies upon are the result of significant efforts by human rights and humanitarian organizations that have been working tirelessly to document the numbers of IDPs, casualties, and missing individuals. In addition to their work, neighboring countries, as well as countries in Europe, Canada, and the United States, have made substantial efforts in this regard. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has also played a crucial role in providing support to IDPs and refugees, both inside and outside of Syria.

By the end of the second quarter of 2021, Jusoor Center was able to map the demographic changes in Syria and estimate the numbers in various regions. As time passed, issues related to population estimation remained a part of the work conducted by the research team of the Center and partner institutions. Numerous adjustments and improvements were made to the main transformations and primary sources relied upon in the estimation process.

By the end of the second quarter of 2021, Jusoor Center was able to draw a map of demographic transformations in Syria⁴ and estimate numbers in various areas. As time has passed, population issues have remained a part of the work of the research team and partner institutions. Many modifications and developments have been made to the main transformations and primary sources relied upon in the estimation process.

After some time from the initial population estimate for Syria, Jusoor Center is providing updates to these figures, especially following the earthquake that have significantly contributed to displacement movements and migration once again.

Jusoor Center intended to release updated versions of this map periodically by the end of the first quarter of 2022, but it was not done for various reasons. At the same time, the Center released more details related to population issues, where the Center published statistics in May about students and the pre-university education sector in Syria, as well as a report on the Syrian regime's approach to issues of detainees in Syria.

⁴ The population transformation in Syria from 2011 to 2021, Bridges Center for Studies, 25/03/2021 [Link](#).

Furthermore, they issued a brief summary on financial remittances received by the population in 2021 and closely monitored the impact of the Russo-Ukrainian war on Syrians. They also conducted a thorough review of various numbers related to food and financial issues, which provide significant insights into population figures. All of these efforts contributed, in one way or another, to estimating the population numbers, alongside ongoing periodic monitoring operations.

The Center used official and semi-official figures, as well as numbers provided by humanitarian and human rights organizations, which played a significant role in monitoring partial issues that contribute to population estimates. The Center's research staff relied at least on three sources for each number and compared them with the sources it already possessed, forming a perception of the population map. An updated version of this map will be presented, addressing the population figures of Syrians inside and outside Syria, taking into account the earthquake that struck the country in February 2023.

The numbers relied upon in the map include the total population of Syria, the numbers of refugees in European countries, as well as figures related to the Syrian population in neighboring countries, for which the Center formulated equations that helped reach acceptable estimates. Jusoor extensively researched the numbers of Syrians inside Syria, reviewed numerous sources and references, and made adjustments to the numbers using detailed calculations.

The numbers of detainees and missing individuals posed a problematic issue, and caution was exercised in dealing with them. The Center relied on figures provided by human rights organizations that monitor these issues on a daily basis, such as the Syrian Network for Human Rights, which has made and continues to make significant efforts in this regard.

Similarly, the numbers of Syrians in the Gulf states and Egypt present a significant challenge. While there has been a large number of Syrians in the Gulf states since the 1980s, they have intermingled with newly arrived migrants, leading to considerable discrepancies in the reported figures. Official statements from Saudi Arabia in 2016 indicated the presence of 2.5 million Syrians in the country, while the UN Resident Coordinator in Saudi Arabia⁵ estimated the numbers to be half a million in 2015. In the UAE⁶, residency permits for Syrians have increased, and Qatar has welcomed a significant number of Syrian students. Additionally, Oman

⁵ **Syrians in Saudi Arabia: The truth behind the Kingdom's narrative on refugee numbers**, Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed, 04/08/2020. [Link](#).

⁶ **Towards a Realistic Assessment of Gulf Countries' Reception of Syrians**, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 30/09/2015. [Link](#).

has seen an influx of individuals seeking employment opportunities. These variations prompted Jusoor to review the numbers multiple times and ultimately settle on the minimum agreed-upon figures.

In Egypt, there have been conflicting statements regarding the number of Syrians in the country. While the International Organization for Migration stated that the number of Syrians in Egypt is 1.5 million, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi stated several months prior to the release of the organization's data that the number of Syrians in Egypt had reached half a million. Moreover, Egypt's representative to the United Nations stated during the Brussels Donors Conference in 2022 that the number could reach 400,000 Syrians. It is worth noting that the official Egyptian figures aimed to secure additional support for the country through direct requests from donors at the Brussels conference. This ultimately led the Center to adopt the minimum numbers after discrepancies with the figures from the UN Refugee Agency and unofficial local institutions.

Overall, Jusoor Center continues to address population issues, important economic and social indicators as part of its mission. The Center strives to develop these indicators and figures through the ongoing tasks of its staff.

The distribution of the population between inside and outside the areas of control in Syria in 2023

The total number of Syrians by the end of the first quarter of 2023



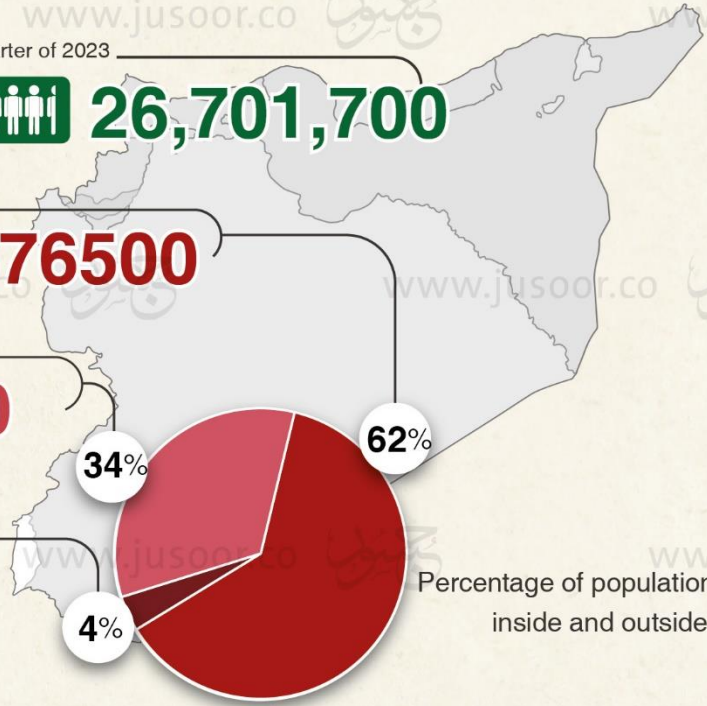
of them inside Syria



of them outside Syria



Dead and absent



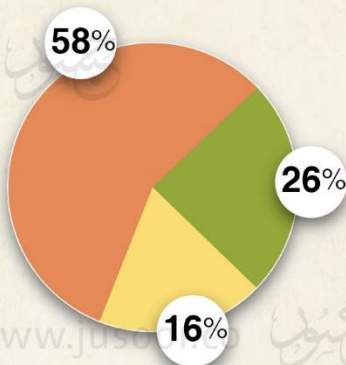
The population inside Syria at the end of the first quarter of 2023



The population within the areas controlled by the regime



The population outside the regime's control areas



4,367,800

in opposition-held areas



2,654,000

In SDF-controlled areas



First: Migration and Displacement

The displacement of people from various areas within Syria began in early 2012. The use of violence against protesters, the besiegement of neighborhoods by snipers and tanks, and the initiation of military operations in certain areas led to the exodus of many residents from their homes and locations they used to inhabit.

In Homs, the number of displaced individuals from the city was significant in 2012. These individuals were dispersed among peripheral neighborhoods within the city, such as Al-Waer district, as well as nearby cities and towns like Palmyra and Al-Qaryatayn. Additionally, many sought refuge in neighboring countries, including Lebanon.

This image was almost replicated across all Syrian cities and regions. Over time, the situation became more complex, and the displaced people spilled out to the outskirts of the Syrian territory, where they settled near the borders and in neighboring countries. Meanwhile, the journey of seeking asylum in European countries, US, and some African countries began.

Since the beginning of 2019, there haven't been significant changes in the Syrian refugee movement, as many waves of displacement have subsided. This is due to a relative calmness within Syria and the subsequent impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has frozen the world for over a year and a half, partially affecting the Syrian situation as well. However, IDPs continued to move within the northern regions of Syria to varying extents.

Amongst the neighboring countries, Lebanon has been the most prominent country since 2019, as the Lebanese financial crisis and subsequent protests contributed to the movement of some Syrians towards European countries and, at times, back to Syria. However, the numbers were not significantly high due to global circumstances and the divergent political views in Lebanon regarding the refugee issue, as is the case with other issues in the country.

During the period between 2021 and 2022, global circumstances had a significant impact on refugees in general, and Syrians in particular, as they are highly vulnerable groups in the countries they reside in. The devastating earthquake in 2023 further exacerbated the difficulties for Syrian refugees in Turkey, coinciding with the approaching Turkish presidential elections, which made the refugee issue a prominent topic among competing political parties. This prompted more Syrians to either return to their homeland or seek refuge in Europe.



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The distribution of the population inside Syria will be determined by the end of the first quarter of 2023.

The population inside Syria at the end of the first quarter of 2023



16676500



4346300

Population in northern Syria
(opposition-controlled areas)



9654700

The population within
the regime areas



2654000

Population in the east of
the Euphrates (SDF control areas)



21500

The population of the opposition-
controlled 55km area

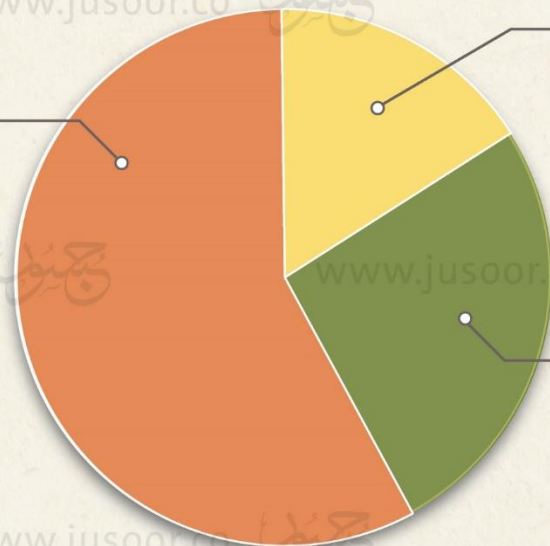
58%

16%

26%

Percentage distribution of
the population inside Syria
according to areas of control

- Opposition-held areas
- Regime control areas
- Areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces



Second: The most notable transformations in the Syrian population landscape:

The period between 2019 and the end of the first quarter of 2023 witnessed significant transformations in the Syrian population landscape, particularly concerning refugee issues. This period was characterized by the following:

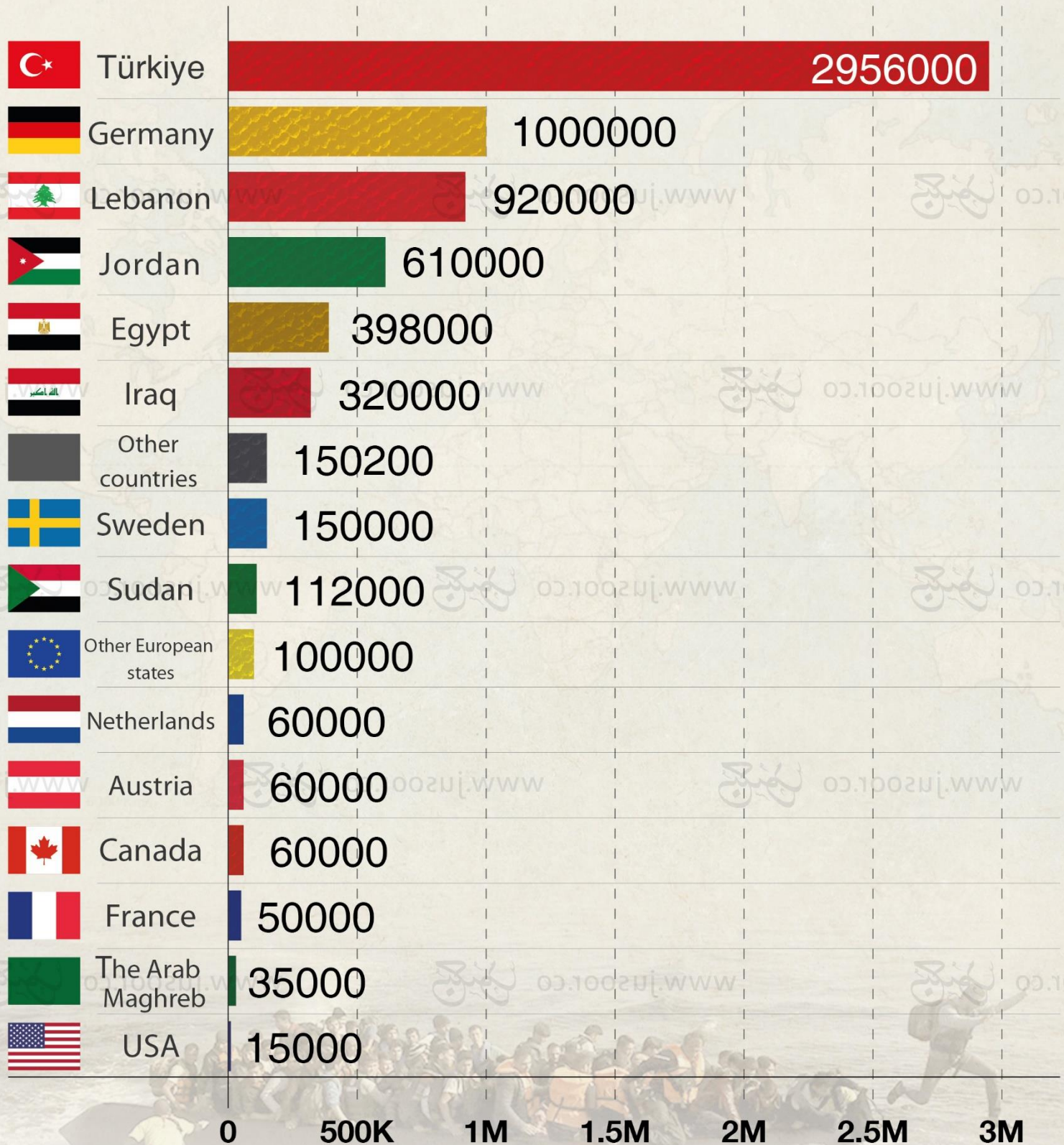
- The movement of asylum seekers has been primarily concentrated within Syrian regions, entering a new phase of internal displacement. This has given rise to a new category of displaced persons known as "IIDPs" or Internally Displaced Persons within Syrian regions. Former IDPs from northern Syria, for example, are now moving within the same northern region, and the same applies to northeastern Syria.
- The impact of the Lebanese financial and political crisis on Syrian refugees has placed significant pressure on this group, leading to their repositioning both inside and outside Lebanon. Inside Lebanon, this has involved transitioning from municipalities hostile to their presence to more accepting ones. Outside Lebanon, there has been an increase in requests for resettlement registration, with over 25,000 new resettlement requests recorded in 2021⁷. Additionally, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of boats departing from Lebanese shores towards European countries.
- The emergence of other refugee crises has led to a decline in the proportion of Syrian refugees in Europe and the United States. Refugees have started to flow in large numbers from Afghanistan and Ukraine due to the U.S. withdrawal and its allies from Afghanistan and the Russian-Ukrainian war. In 2021, Syrian nationality dropped to the second position in terms of the ⁸ number of asylum applications in Europe, behind Afghan nationality.
- Political shifts in Turkey have prompted many Syrians to return to northern Syria or move to other countries, as competition between the government and opposition on refugee issues and rapprochement with the Syrian regime increased, alongside rising inflation rates.
- Egyptian facilitations for Syrians to access its territories have increased the number of Syrians residing in Egypt, particularly from the middle class and those remaining from the wealthy Syrian class. A report by the International Organization for Migration confirmed that the number of Syrians in Egypt exceeded 1.5 million in 2022⁹.
- The earthquake that struck southern Turkey and northern Syria in February 2023 resulted in displacement movements of Syrians within Syria and Turkey, as well as a significant number of them returning to Syria.

⁷ Syrians in Lebanon: 4,600 Resettlements since the beginning of 2020 and demands for improved aid, 10/08/2021. [Link](#).

⁸ **Asylum Report 2022**, European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022, Page 93, [Link](#).

⁹ Migration Numbers in Egypt, International Organization for Migration in Egypt, 1/06/2022. [Link](#).

The distribution of the population outside Syria at the end of the first quarter of 2023



The total number of displaced persons outside Syria

6996200

Numbers after the intersection of the official number with other sources (three sources)

Conclusion:

The new population dispersal of Syrians has transitioned from a temporary state to a more enduring situation. The monitoring of refugee conditions in Western countries and neighboring countries, their pursuit of citizenship, establishment of businesses, engagement in community work, learning local languages, and the significant level of integration all indicate that this state lays the foundation for a permanent phase in which the majority of Syrians will not return to their homeland.

The concerning situation in neighboring countries, especially Lebanon and Turkey, has become a burden on Syrian refugees residing there. This has made the numbers of Syrians in these countries unstable, and it is expected that they will undergo significant transformations in the next three years.

Furthermore, the relative calm resulting from the reduction in military operations in Syria indicates that the displacement movement will not undergo further significant changes. The population numbers in the divided Syrian areas are likely to remain relatively stable in terms of internal transformations, at the very least.

Finally, the Syrian economic situation, especially in regime-controlled areas, suggests that any legal loopholes in Arab or Western countries, such as facilitations or welcoming measures, can increase the number of arrivals to these countries. This means that the numbers will depend on the willingness and responsiveness of Western and Arab countries to receive more refugees or residents. While Egypt has chosen to grant visas in exchange for fees that the poor class cannot afford, Western countries tend to attract primarily the impoverished classes, prioritizing individuals such as patients, former detainees, and others.



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