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Middle East North Africa (MENA) Refugee Crisis: Digital Resources in Review

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Instability in the Middle East has become increasingly marked since the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 and escalating refugee flows and internally displaced populations continue to invoke global humanitarian and political concern. Although neighbouring countries have predominantly assumed responsibility for those displaced in the region, movements of desperate people into Europe has further heightened awareness of the regional crisis. While there is international awareness through press coverage and all-pervasive social media forums, for those interested in accessing more critical and comprehensive sources for Middle Eastern refugees there is a wealth of material available. This article provides an overview to a selection of these, much of which are Open Access.

As Subject Consultant for Forced Migration at the Bodleian Social Science Library at the University of Oxford, Sarah Rhodes is fortunate to work with one of the world's best collections on population displacement. This collection, formerly housed at the **Refugee Studies Centre** (**RSC**), was created in the mid-1980s and consequently also charts some of the earlier conflicts within the region. The library catalogue, **Search Oxford Libraries Online** (**SOLO**), can be searched, and in some cases full-text documents from the unpublished document collection can be accessed as a link through to the Forced Migration Online Digital Library.

Resources from within the Academic Community

The work of the RSC, also based in Oxford, complements the physical library collections. Searching its website will retrieve publications including working papers, policy

briefs, and **Forced Migration Review** (**FMR**). These sources are freely available and cover key issues and regions, including the Middle East. FMR, provides a forum for the exchange of information, experiences, and ideas between researchers, refugees, and internally displaced people. It regularly publishes articles on the Middle East with 446 currently listed on its site. In January 2016, Issue 51, *Destination: Europe*, addressed the mass movements of people from the MENA region into Europe, and the February 2018 Issue (57), *Syrians in Displacement*, focused specifically on the millions of Syrians displaced both internally and in neighbouring countries.

Hosted by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, **Eldis** is a portal for full-text research and policy documents from over 8,000 publishers. While focused primarily on development issues there are relevant topics such as conflict, security, and migration with country specific tabs leading to Middle East refugee information.

Archive Collections

In addition to contemporary materials, archival collections also offer an historical perspective on displaced people. As an example of such collections, the University of Oxford houses the extensive Oxfam archive going back some sixty years; has recently acquired the Brookings Global Internally Displaced Persons archive and holds the papers detailing the founding and work of the organization **Medical Aid to Palestinians** (**MAP**). These can be consulted in person, on application to the Bodleian Libraries.

Open Access Journals

Although there are key academic, peer reviewed journals for refugee studies including the trio published by Oxford University Press (OUP) – *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *International Journal of Refugee law* and *Refugee Survey Quarterly* – a paid subscription is

needed to access their articles. Increasingly, however, the advent of Open Access has made more journals freely available. In addition to *FMR* mentioned above, readers have access to refugee-related content via: *Middle East Journal of Refugee Studies*; *Journal of Internal Displacement*; *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration* *(OxMo)*; and the archive of *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*. In response to the refugee crisis in Europe, OUP has also made available **Oxford Public International Law** **(OPIL)** material. This offers free access to key resources on refugee law, some of which has been published in their refugee journals mentioned above.

Websites: Full-Text Documents and News

Websites also list invaluable resources. A selection, highlighted below, provides a range of literature formats. One of the main sites is **Refworld**, the UNHCR's freely searchable portal, with access to such material as country information, thematic guidelines, statistics and operational data, nationality and statelessness laws, and special features. **Reliefweb** is another, providing reliable and timely humanitarian information on global crises and disasters since 1996, with tabs for updates, countries, disasters, and thematic topics. Searches can be made for individual countries such as Syria; organizations such as the Norwegian Refugee Council; or themes including safety and security. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), working to provide assistance and protection to Palestinian refugees in the region, also has a resources section holding reports, emergency appeals, strategy and policy. For news reporting from crisis frontlines the reader can search **IRIN** which, since leaving the UN in 2015, now offers an independent voice in the humanitarian sector, to help shape the debate about crisis response. The Middle East is currently one of its featured topics.

Campaigning groups, such as **Human Rights Watch,** issue reports and briefings from human rights professionals to provide impartial and targeted advocacy in their work with governments and international organizations. **Amnesty International**, with its Middle East and North Africa arm, campaigns for dispossessed people and provides useful links. The mission of the **European Council on Refugees and Exiles** (**ECRE**), as a pan-European alliance of 95 NGOs, is to protect and advance the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced persons in Europe. Its site lists both policy notes and papers, as well as legal notes on issues facing refugees within the nation states. Finally, the **International Organization for Migration** (**IOM**), committed, as stated on its website, to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society, offers a wealth of information including news and situation reports. Of additional interest is the displacement tracking matrix which assesses movements of people, both when and where, due to conflict, natural hazards, and political or economic reasons, and the **Migration Data Portal**. The latter provides statistics for forced migrants, displaced within the Middle East.

Keeping Up to Date

Finally, readers seeking to keep up to date on an evolving MENA environment can do so via blog posts. One key blog for refugees is the **Forced Migration Current Awareness Blog** set up by Elisa Mason to offer a "service highlighting web research and information relating to refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and other forced migrants."[1] This service is updated daily and provides information on such items as new books, reports, legal resources, research tools, pieces with specific thematic focus, and web links. This is an ideal starting point for discovering many of the sources highlighted above as

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[1] Elisa Mason, *Forced Migration Current Awareness*, June 6, 2018, https://fm-cab.blogspot.com/.

well as for providing current awareness for a region in turmoil, with a population experiencing the trauma of conflict and displacement.

List of online sources in order of discussion:

1) Refugee Studies Centre **(RSC)**

2) Search Oxford Libraries Online **(SOLO)**

3) Forced Migration Review **(FMR)**

4) Eldis

5) Catalogue of the Oxfam Archive

6) Catalogue of the Brookings Global IDP Archive

7) Middle East Journal of Refugee Studies **(MEJRS)**

8) Journal of Internal Displacement **(JID)**

9) Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration **(OxMo)**

10) Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees **(RCJR)**

11) Oxford Public International Law **(OPIL)**

12) Refworld

13) Reliefweb

14) United Nations Relief and Works Agency **(UNRWA)**

15) Integrated Regional Information Networks **(IRIN)**

16) Human Rights Watch **(HRW)**

17) Amnesty International

18) European Council on Refugees and Exiles **(ECRE)**

19) International Organization for Migration **(IOM)**

20) Migration Data Portal **(MDP)**

21) Forced Migration Current Awareness Blog