

## Opinion

## Editorial

## The Arab lost generation

The recently released UNICEF report *Education under Fire* draws a disturbing picture of “how conflict in the Middle East is depriving children of their schooling”.

According to the report, no fewer than 13 million children are unable to attend school as a result of armed conflict in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Sudan. Nearly 9,000 schools in Syria, Yemen and Libya are unusable, either damaged or destroyed, or being used as shelters by displaced populations or warring factions.

In Syria, 2 million children are out of school and 446,000 are at risk of dropping out. In Yemen, 1.8 million children have had their access to school interrupted by war and more than 3,500 schools have been shut down. School enrolment has dropped by 50% in Libya’s second city Benghazi where only one in four schools is functioning. The same story is replayed in Iraq where 3 million have been displaced and nearly 1 million children have had their schooling disrupted; 1,200 Iraqi schools have been transformed into shelters.

Commuting to school has become perilous for children in war zones. Crossing checkpoints is not safe for anyone at any age. Schools are not immune to armed violence. Public transportation in the war-torn nations has come to a virtual standstill.

In 2014, 214 schools in the region were attacked. In one 2015 incident, in Yemen’s Amran governorate, 13 teachers and four children were killed. In Iraq, 700 children have been killed and another 500 injured. In Gaza, 551 children were killed and 281 schools were damaged during the Israeli assault in the summer of 2014.

Even when physically safe, going to school often is useless considering the shortage of teachers and supplies.

The result is that in many parts of the Middle East and North Africa, children are unable to get an education and therefore will be ill-prepared for a future society where no rebuilding is possible if the next generation is not well-trained or well-educated.

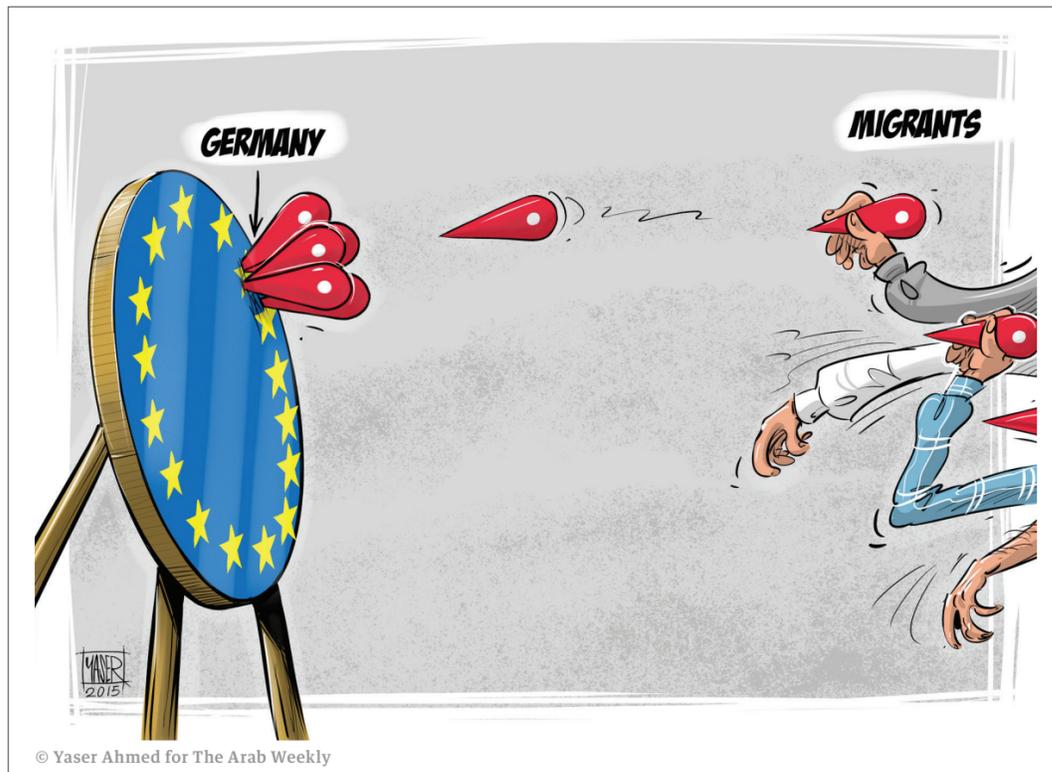
It is hardly a surprise that entire families are trying to migrate to Europe. Many simply want their children to get an education and have a real chance at achievement.

For refugee populations displaced outside their borders, conditions for proper educational training are not guaranteed in the region’s host countries. The UNICEF report states that 53% of Syrian refugee children in neighbouring countries do not attend school. This is unconscionable, given that the host countries in question are not experiencing conflict. Of course, budget-challenged states such as Jordan and Lebanon cannot be expected to provide an education for thousands of refugee children. But where are regional and international organisations?

For those children who cannot migrate anywhere, the odds are that they will end up exploited and poor, assuming they can escape death and injury. Destitution and despair will make them an easy prey to recruitment by extremist groups or criminal organisations.

The collective tragedy that has befallen the Arab world has more manifestations than one can keep count of. But the plight of the region’s children is perhaps the most devastating. While other regions of the world – China, South Asia, Africa – are investing in their children’s future, the governments and militias of the Middle East and North Africa are focused on winning bloody civil wars.

We are in the process of creating a lost generation. Millions of children will grow up uneducated, unproductive and only trained to suffer and hate.



© Yaser Ahmed for The Arab Weekly

## Will Aylan launch a thousand ships?



John Hendel

The image is searing. A small body, face down on the shore, washed from the Mediterranean onto a Turkish beach. Tiny. Alone. Dead. The victim of an attempt to escape death, only to have it find him during a desperate trek taken in the hope of finding safety.

This is a sign of failure, not of a single boat foundering before delivering its cargo of migrants to Europe, a land that promises a future and, more important, security. No, this is a failure of world leaders to recognise that there is – and has been for some time – a crisis of unimaginable magnitude taking place on eastern and southern Mediterranean shores.

Some who are trying to enter Europe are economic refugees looking for a better life. There are very good reasons they are leaving their homes as they look to the future. Economies affected by terror and war have stagnated, severely limiting the prospects of young people in these countries. Some seek a better life elsewhere; others become convinced a better future can be found through radicalisation.

However, hundreds of thousands of people – let’s stress that word “people” – are trying to escape unimaginable conditions and dire threats across the Mediterranean basin. They are looking for a sanctuary from almost certain death.

The reasons are many but two of the most obvious are the Islamic State (ISIS) and the fighting in Syria. ISIS uses draconian methods to keep its “citizens” in line in territory it controls. The result is a predictable exodus. In Syria, suffering through that oxymoronic term “civil war”, millions have left because of widespread violence and atrocities – barrel bombs,

chemical weapons – carried out by all sides.

While these battles go on over patches of dirt and sand, people are suffering to a degree that is unfathomable to most in the Western world. They are tormented to the point that they leave generations-old homesteads just to

keep their family safe. Despite tales of hundreds of migrants dying while trying

similar escapes, they pay smugglers large sums in the hope of passage to safer lands.

All too often these migrants suffer the fate handed to 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, whose body was found on the Turkish beach. To paraphrase Joseph Stalin, one small boy drowning is a tragedy; thousands dying is a statistic.

The power of the image of Aylan’s body on the beach – tragedy that it is – must push all leaders to see that the thousands who are running from death and destruction represent a catastrophe of another magnitude. Even as he was being buried, along with his mother and brother, who were also among 12 people who died when their boat capsized September 2nd, the tragedy continued to unfold.

“Will the image of Aylan Kurdi be the face that launches a thousand ships to meet this humanity crisis?”

Pictures of overcrowded boats barely afloat and of long lines of faceless people waiting to enter the bureaucratic limbo before learning whether they meet the current definition of “refugee” are easier to ignore – the “tragedy” versus “statistic” argument. But Aylan is putting a face – a very human face – on the problem. His plight grabbed attention. Now the world must act on it. Will this truly matter or will the powers that be once again initiate a “hashtag” campaign to show their “concern” only to forget Aylan, his brother and mother and the thousands like them once the “send” key is pushed?

The kidnapping of Helen of Troy, whose beauty is said to be the “Face that Launched a Thousand Ships”, led to the Trojan War.

Beauty is certainly worth fighting for; humanity, however, is an even greater cause and reason to be moved to action. Will the image of Aylan Kurdi be the face that launches a thousand ships to meet this humanity crisis?

John Hendel is Senior Editor for The Arab Weekly. He lives in the United States.

## The Arab Weekly

Published by Al Arab Publishing House

Publisher  
and Group Executive Editor  
**Haitham El-Zobaidi, PhD**

Editor-in-Chief  
**Oussama Romdhani**

Deputy Editor-in-Chief  
**Dalal Saoud**

Senior Editor  
**John Hendel**

Chief Copy Editors  
**Jonathan Hemming**  
and **Richard Pretorius**

Analysis Section Editor  
**Ed Blanche**

Opinion Section Editor  
**Claude Salhani**

East/West Section Editor  
**Mark Habeeb**

Levant Section Editor  
**Jamal Halaby**

Gulf Section Editor  
**Mohammed Alkhereiji**

Society and Travel  
Sections Editor  
**Samar Kadi**

Correspondents  
**Tom Dinham** (London),  
**Dominique Roch** (Beirut),  
**Houda Ferjani** (Paris),  
and **Justin Salhani** (Washington)

Contact editor at:  
[editor@theArabWeekly.com](mailto:editor@theArabWeekly.com)

Subscription & Advertising:  
[Ads@alarab.co.uk](mailto:Ads@alarab.co.uk)  
Tel 020 3667 7249

Mohamed Al Mufti  
Marketing & Advertising  
Manager

Tel (Main) +44 20 6702 3999  
Direct: +44 20 8742 9262  
[www.alarab.co.uk](http://www.alarab.co.uk)

Al Arab Publishing House  
Kensington Centre  
66 Hammersmith Road  
London W14 8UD, UK

Tel: (+44) 20 7602 3999  
Fax: (+44) 20 7602 8778

“The reasons are many but two of the most obvious are the Islamic State (ISIS) and the fighting in Syria”