

UNHCR PARTNERSHIP WITH THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES (LAS)

NOVEMBER 2022

Overview

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has continued to face extensive levels of displacement, particularly over the past ten years. With conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, the Arab region hosts 53 per cent and 67 per cent of the refugee and forcibly displaced populations worldwide, respectively. Tense security conditions and political unrest in many parts of the MENA region remain a significant challenge. On a separate yet related note, several countries in the region have become essential transit points along the irregular migration routes used by refugees and migrants in “Mixed Migration Flows.”

To this end, UNHCR works closely with the League of Arab States (LAS) and its Member States¹ to enhance the protection space for people forced to flee. The legal document regulating the LAS-UNHCR collaboration is a general agreement signed in 2000, later amended through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2017. In this MoU, both organizations advocate for access to safety and protection from *refoulement*; reinforcing registration and refugee status determination; promoting legislative frameworks; addressing the risks of statelessness; ensuring security from violence and exploitation; and working towards durable solutions, including increased resettlement efforts for refugees and asylum-seekers.

UNHCR and LAS organize regular coordination meetings and capacity-building sessions at the sectoral, regional, ministerial, and expert levels. These sessions aim to enhance the dialogue with the concerned authorities on refugees and provide assistance in developing their policies on asylum, statelessness, internal displacement and mixed migratory movements.

Thanks to the partnership with UNHCR, the League of Arab States has adopted three strategies to enhance the protection of refugees in the region:

- The Arab Strategy for the Protection of Refugee Children in Asylum Context in the Arab Region, 2019.
- The Arab Strategy on Access to Public Health Services in Asylum and Displacement Contexts in the Arab region, 2019.
- The Arab Strategy on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Asylum and Displacement Context, especially Sexual Violence against Women, 2021.

Thematic Areas

In addition to protection, UNHCR and LAS collaborate on several thematic areas, including:

- **Internally Displaced Persons**

The League of Arab States Council adopted several Ministerial and Summit-level decisions regarding "Support for internally displaced persons in Arab countries, especially Iraqi internally displaced persons." This resolution has become a permanent agenda item for discussion at the Councils of the League of Arab

States, at the Arab Summits and at Ministerial level meetings. In collaboration with UNHCR, periodic reports are submitted to the League's Council to review the progress made in its implementation.

- **Reduction of Statelessness**

UNHCR and LAS have worked jointly since 2016 on the portfolio of Statelessness. Currently, the Arab Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity is under revision before its submission to and eventual adoption by the Arab Social Affairs Ministers Justice Councils. The draft declaration is accompanied by a regional plan of action designed in this regard.

- **Mixed Movements and National Security**

Since 2016 and making sure that refugee protection is not undermined, several meetings have taken place to address national security issues related to mixed movements in the Central Mediterranean. Member States have agreed on the priorities and modalities to strengthen protection in mixed movements in the North African region, considering the situation and policies in the countries of origin and destination.

- **Capacity Development**

Training opportunities have played an essential role in developing the capacity of Member States on refugee protection and forging stronger partnerships with government officials. The training events have directly contributed to enhancing the capacity and expertise of government officials on issues related to asylum, internal displacement, and statelessness. Ongoing capacity development and advocacy efforts have been agreed on between LAS and UNHCR.

- **Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)**

As part of its strategic engagement and to promote the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR, in collaboration with LAS, convened several meetings of the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Refugees and Migration (ARCP), in addition to other activities aimed at briefing Member States on the processes and developments related to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). These efforts led to LAS making two pledges at the GRF. The first is on the renewal of the League's commitment to providing decent living conditions for refugees, and the second is on launching the Arab Strategy on displaced children.