

## **Update on UNHCR's operations in the Middle East and North Africa**

### **A. Situational context including new developments**

#### *Syria situation*

The Syria situation remains the largest humanitarian and displacement crisis in the world today, with some 6.2 million Syrians internally displaced and over 5.6 million refugees hosted in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. With the emergence of pockets of relative stability, some 56,000 Syrian refugees and 1.4 million internally displaced people (IDPs) returned to their areas of origin in 2018. Despite operational challenges, UNHCR's response inside the Syrian Arab Republic reached millions of people: over 2 million with protection services; more than 250,000 with shelter support; almost 1.9 million with basic relief items; and some 390,000 with health assistance (all figures as of November 2018). In addition, over 400,000 people were reached with basic relief items and shelter support through cross-border interventions from Jordan and Turkey.

Living conditions for Syrian refugees in the region continue to be precarious, with over half of the Syrian refugee population living in poverty in some host countries. While host countries have taken measures to provide refugee with access to health, education and legal work, sustained support from the international community remains essential. In 2019, UNHCR will continue advocating for access to asylum and expanded international responsibility-sharing to reduce the pressure on host countries in the region.

Together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNHCR leads the "Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in response to the Syria crisis" (3RP), which is built around government-led national plans, with humanitarian and development programming, and a coalition of over 270 partners. The 3RP 2019-2020, released in December 2018, calls for \$5.5 billion for 2019 to assist over 9 million people, including 5.6 million refugees and 3.9 million host community members. In 2019, the plan will maintain its focus on providing comprehensive protection and assistance support to refugees, while also ensuring that resilience building, sustainability and local engagement are factored into all steps of the response.

UNHCR maintains a comprehensive approach towards protecting and assisting Syrian refugees, aimed at pursuing the full range of durable solutions. For those refugees who choose to return to the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR provides support to help them return in dignity. Examples of support include documentation, and counselling, as well as finding solutions for unaccompanied or separated children. UNHCR continues to work with stakeholders to help gradually remove obstacles to return in Syria.

As part of the comprehensive approach, UNHCR and its 3RP partners continue to support refugees, host communities and countries across the region. For example, UNHCR transfers cash to some 70,000 refugee households (around 450,000 individuals) each month, while additional families benefit from its cash coordination mechanisms with partners. The

2018 winter programme has reached some 2.5 million Syrians and Iraqis, mostly through multi-purpose cash transfers.

#### *Iraq situation*

The Government of Iraq declared in December 2017 that it had regained control of all Iraqi territory. Nevertheless, the scale and severity of humanitarian needs remain enormous and rehabilitation has not taken place at the anticipated pace. According to the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) displacement tracking matrix some 2.8 million people in Iraq are displaced inside the country, including some 1.8 million who have been displaced as a result of conflict and violence since 2014. There are also over four million IDPs who have returned and who face constrained access to basic services and a lack of security. They also have to contend with destroyed properties and critical infrastructure, protection risks, and a dearth of livelihood opportunities and financial resources. In some instances, this has led to secondary displacement or re-admittance to camps for those for whom return was not possible or sustainable.

Some IDPs have been barred from returning to areas of origin by security actors, tribal leaders or communities. There are also widespread reports of confiscation of documents, limits on free movement, collective punishment and excessive security screening of individuals suspected of extremist affiliation.

In 2018, UNHCR assisted 48,800 Iraqi IDP and returnee families with core relief items (as of end-November). The Office assessed the protection needs of some 57,000 families with the Comprehensive Household Assessment Tool. In 2019, UNHCR will continue timely protection monitoring and outreach activities to assess needs and to provide legal assistance and civil documentation support to IDPs, returnees and other conflict-affected Iraqis and refer them to specialized services. UNHCR will also provide shelter, basic household items and protection to over hundreds of thousands of IDPs in camps. There are currently 121 IDP camps in Iraq hosting some 454,900 individuals and 44 of these are managed by UNHCR and its partners.

In 2019, UNHCR will remain engaged with the Iraqi authorities, as well as with humanitarian and development actors to transition from humanitarian response for IDPs to including their needs in development plans, and support a gradual absorption into the Iraqi social welfare system. UNHCR co-leads with UN Habitat the Working Group on Sustainable Solutions for IDPs within the two-year Resilience and Recovery Programme.

#### *North Africa*

There are over one million persons of concern to UNHCR in North Africa, which has a complex operational environment involving both new and protracted displacement situations. The situation in Libya is expected to remain volatile. In August and September 2018, UNHCR provided emergency assistance to some 5,000 people who had been displaced in Tripoli as a result of violence in the capital. Despite ongoing restrictions, UNHCR was able to evacuate over 2,800 refugees and asylum-seekers from Libya to Italy, Niger and Romania in 2018. Although this is encouraging, more than 5,000 people remain in official detention facilities, living in dire conditions. Some 3,800 of them are of concern to UNHCR. The Office and its partners conducted over 1,400 visits to 35 detention centres in 2018, securing the release for the purpose of evacuation of more than 2,700 people.

In Egypt, where 242,900 refugees and asylum-seekers from 65 countries are registered with UNHCR, some progress was made to include refugee children in the national education system. In Mauritania, the Government began issuing national identity cards for over 57,000 Malian refugees in the Mbera camp, as a result of UNHCR's advocacy for the adoption of a national asylum law. The country also saw new arrivals from Mali. In Morocco,

UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding with the national employment agency and the Office for the Development of Cooperation to support livelihood opportunities for refugees.

In addition, UNHCR continues to provide life-saving assistance to vulnerable Sahrawi refugees in the five camps located near Tindouf, Algeria. In the context of Algeria's multi-year, multi-partner protection and solutions strategy, UNHCR brought together different actors – including refugee communities, government entities, United Nations agencies and others partners – to advocate for the establishment of a national asylum system.

#### *Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)*

During 2018, UNHCR continued its resource mobilization efforts in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, raising nearly US\$200 million. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, UNHCR signed a cooperation agreement with the King Salman Relief Centre to provide kidney dialysis to Syrian refugee patients in Lebanon and Jordan, as well as funding for shelter and core relief items in Bangladesh. In the United Arab Emirates, the Office renewed its partnership with the Emirati Red Crescent through a project for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda. In 2019, UNHCR will continue to strengthen its different partnerships with GCC countries, exploring avenues for cooperation with the private sector in the region.

In Qatar, a law regulating asylum was adopted, which contained a number of provisions on respecting the rights of refugees. In the United Arab Emirates, the extension of an amnesty period allowed many persons of concern to UNHCR to obtain the relevant documentation and apply for an employment visa or – in the case of Syrians, Yemenis and Libyans – a one-year residency permit.

#### *Israel*

In Israel, UNHCR advocates for fair procedures, access to public services and enhanced livelihood opportunities for asylum-seekers and refugees. It also pursues the implementation of a Comprehensive Solutions Strategy for Sudanese and Eritrean persons of concern. The wide-spread detention and forced relocation of persons of concern to UNHCR to Rwanda and Uganda were ceased, while their enforced residence in Holot, a semi-detention center in the Negev desert, has also been ended. In December, the Attorney General recommended the re-examination of the criteria applied to asylum requests by Eritreans in Israel, following a ruling last February by an Immigration Appeals Tribunal. UNHCR's assistance has been sought on managing refugee status determinations and determining inclusion criteria.

#### *Yemen*

Some 22.2 million Yemenis – over three quarters of the country's population – remain in need of humanitarian assistance, with approximately 11.3 million having acute needs. The conflict situation in Yemen worsened in the fall of 2018, leading to large-scale displacement. Localized clashes and larger battles occurred throughout the second half of the year, notably in the governorates of Taizz and Al Hudaydah. As many as 600,000 people have fled fighting in Al Hudaydah since June. Civilian displacement and casualties were also reported in other governorates, most notably Sa'ada (north of Sana'a).

UNHCR provided assistance to over 800,000 IDPs, returnees and communities. Around 85 per cent of UNHCR's assistance was provided followed the June escalation of fighting in Al Hudaydah. Close to 800,000 Yemenis and 130,000 refugees received cash assistance, which will remain a key element of UNHCR's programme in Yemen in 2019.

Despite the conflict and dire humanitarian situation, people continue to arrive in Yemen from the Horn of Africa. More than 4,400 asylum-seekers were registered with UNHCR. Of them, over 90 per cent came from Somalia, while the remainder came from Ethiopia, Eritrea, the

Syrian Arab Republic and other countries. UNHCR's assisted spontaneous return programme helped 2,591 Somalis return to Somalia in 2018. The programme continues to provide information and counselling on returns to thousands of Somalis through three return help-desks in Kharaz Camp, Al Mukalla City and Basateen neighbourhood, and in Aden. UNHCR assisted with the resettlement of 114 refugees who were identified as being particularly at risk: 60 Eritreans, 51 Ethiopians and 3 Somalis were resettled.

#### *Mixed and onwards movements*

The overall trend of reduced movements from the Middle East and North Africa has continued with a total of more than 140,000 people reaching Europe in 2018, compared to 172,000 people in 2017 and 363,000 in 2016. Nearly 2,300 people were reported missing or dead at sea. Significant changes were observed in movement patterns, with Spain becoming the primary entry point in the second half of 2018.

Movements by sea from Libya were substantially reduced as a result of enhanced capacity by the Libyan authorities to engage in search and rescue or interception at sea. In total, 13,000 refugees and migrants crossed to Italy from Libya while 15,300 people were transferred to detention facilities following rescue/interception by the Libyan Coast Guard. UNHCR has a number of measures in place to respond to humanitarian needs at disembarkation points and in detention facilities, as well as to identify solutions to third countries including evacuation for the purpose of resettlement. Reception and processing arrangements are also in place in Tunisia to identify people in need of international protection who have been rescued or intercepted at sea by Tunisian authorities. Some 290 people were identified as having such needs in 2018. In view of persisting challenges, UNHCR and IOM have proposed the establishment of a Regional Disembarkation Mechanism providing a sustainable approach to search, rescue and disembarkation based on cooperation and coordination among States. A trend was also observed involving Syrian refugees arriving by boat from Lebanon to Cyprus.

The introduction of restrictive measures to address irregular migration has had an impact on the situation of people of concern to UNHCR with respect to access to territory and procedures, as well as protection from forced return. In a number of countries in the region, asylum-seekers and refugees were refused entry at the border or were caught in collective arrest operations resulting in their forced deportation to third countries. Efforts were made by UNHCR to strengthen outreach and partnerships to disseminate information on how to apply for asylum.

## **B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities**

### *Creating a favourable protection environment*

UNHCR worked with the League of Arab States (LAS) and other partners on the Arab Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity, which was adopted in February 2018. This declaration calls for all children to be able to enjoy their right to a legal identity, including a name, family relations and a nationality, and reaffirms the shared commitment of LAS member States to promote gender-equal nationality laws in the region. Birth registration is essential in this regard, and contributes to the prevention of statelessness. Consequently, UNHCR and 3RP partners have been able to reduce significantly the percentage of Syrian refugee children in the region without any form of identity document from about 35 per cent in 2012 to 1.8 per cent by the end of October 2018.

UNHCR worked with governments and partners to ensure that refugee children and youth could exercise their right to education. Within the framework of the 3RP and No Lost Generation, UNHCR and partners promoted access to national education systems and to post-

basic and higher education. In 2018, the number of school-age Syrian children (those between 5 and 17 years old) enrolled in formal or regulated non-formal education increased to 1.2 million (65 per cent) and while the number of out-of-school children was reduced to 35 per cent, it still meant that 700,000 Syrian refugee children were not in school. These included the most vulnerable and those with disabilities. Access rate in tertiary education remained between 1 and 7 per cent. Barriers to education include a wide range of protection and socio-economic challenges that contribute to negative coping mechanisms, such as child labour, early marriage, and recruitment by armed forces. Additionally, the Syria crisis continues to impose pressure education services in host communities, especially in the smaller countries where resources are particularly stretched. Across the region, sustained support is needed to ensure participation in quality education, in line with the Education 2030 agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4.

UNHCR continued applying community-based protection approaches across the Middle East and North Africa that were inclusive of age, gender and diversity considerations. Over 3,700 community members identified people at heightened risk situation and referred them for support, while some 400 community spaces and centres provided essential assistance and timely information on access to services, psychosocial support and development opportunities for people of concern and vulnerable host-community members. Recognizing the value of initiatives on creating social cohesion, resolving local disputes and organizing campaigns on protection and well-being issues, the Office provided support to community-led initiatives. In parallel, to strengthen the protection response for people with disabilities across the region, a specific exercise to assess their needs was carried out and findings will be used for enhanced protection programming and advocacy.

#### *Ensuring protection from violence and exploitation*

The prevention, mitigation and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is another priority for UNHCR in the region. From January through November 2018, almost 127,000 survivors and people at risk of SGBV, including boys and men, benefited from multi-sectoral services. UNHCR also strengthened the mainstreaming of SGBV prevention, mitigation and response across all areas of programming and intervention by holding a regional workshop in Amman in April for multi-functional staff from operations responding to the Syria situation. This was followed by tailored, national workshops in Lebanon in October and in Iraq in November. Participants initiated the development of country-level action plans to continue the proactive process. To support operations in implementing UNHCR's zero tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEA/SH), a compliance review was carried out and included visits to Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Turkey to formulate recommendations to assist the operations with the strengthening SEA/SH prevention, mitigation and response.

Children continue to be deeply affected by conflict and displacement in the region. Over 2.5 million Syrian children are refugees in the region, while an additional 2.5 million are internally displaced. In Iraq, approximately 2 million people remain internally displaced, and 3.3 million children require humanitarian assistance and protection. In addition to immediate protection and assistance needs, many of these children require longer-term interventions, including mental health and psychosocial services, as well as family tracing and reunification. In 2018, more than 92,000 girls and boys affected by the Syria crisis received specialized child protection services, and over 300,000 children participated in child protection or psychosocial support programmes. Pilot initiatives were launched in the region, including cash assistance, to prevent and mitigate protection risks such as child labour and early marriage. UNHCR and partners supported advocacy and capacity building efforts to ensure that all interventions prioritize the best interests of the child, while improving the quality and accessibility of including mental health and psychosocial services for children contending

with psychosocial distress. UNHCR maintained robust legal aid and community engagement to promote access to civil documentation, including birth and marriage certificates.

#### *Achieving durable solutions*

Some 37,500 refugees from the region, including more than 28,000 Syrians and almost 2,800 Iraqis, were submitted for resettlement in 2018. This amounted to just 6.5 per cent of the region's overall resettlement needs for the year (approximately 580,000 refugees). Some 6,500 fewer refugees were submitted compared to the previous year due to a reduction in resettlement places.

In line with the commitments set out in the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR encouraged new resettlement programmes and the expansion of existing ones as a means of burden- and responsibility-sharing with host countries. In particular, the Office engaged with States to set up new programmes to increase the number of resettlement places and complementary pathways to admission. In addition, UNHCR worked with the Chair of the Syrian Resettlement Core Group (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and the Chair of the Central Mediterranean Core Group (France) throughout 2018 to share good practices, demonstrate the strategic impact of resettlement and identify durable solutions, including the evacuation and resettlement of refugees from Libya. The Office also worked with municipal authorities, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector to analyse the impact of family separation on refugees and provide them with advice on scholarship opportunities as well as pathways for labour mobility. UNHCR conducted best interest determinations for unaccompanied and separated children in the region to identify alternative care arrangements, provide protection and find solutions.

UNHCR is currently not facilitating returns to the Syrian Arab Republic, but together with UN agencies and NGO partners it has been engaged in preparedness and planning for large-scale organized returns since early 2017. The approach of the Office is guided by the “Comprehensive protection and solutions strategy: protection thresholds and parameters for refugee return to Syria,” issued in February 2018. The document sets out the legal, physical and material thresholds – reflecting international standards – that are key for large-scale returns to be safe, dignified, and sustainable.

UNHCR and partners are engaging with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and other stakeholders to address gradually the issues that refugees have identified as inhibiting their return, including through legislation, protection advocacy, and strengthening ongoing programmes. The Office also works closely with the governments of the neighbouring countries on their processes for the voluntary return of Syrian refugees. Examples include helping refugees to reclaim their documents, addressing the specific needs of particularly vulnerable individuals, identifying and finding solutions for unaccompanied and separated children, and counselling refugees on the implications of returning and addressing any questions they might have.

#### *Mobilizing public, political, financial and operational support through strategic partnerships*

In the lead up to the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees in December 2018, strategic partnerships continued to be strengthened, with a new level of attention and focus placed on engaging with different stakeholders and the inclusion of a wide range of partners in the design phase of programmes. The importance of the inclusion of refugees in the evolving entrepreneurship ecosystem in the region was highlighted at the first regional convention of successful businesswomen from across the three sub-regions with the participation of refugee women and those from host communities.

UNHCR engages proactively with multiple stakeholders at the global, regional, country and local levels in order to deliver on its mandate, working in strategic partnership with a wide range of actors to protect and find solutions for persons of concern.

### **C. Financial information**

The current 2019 budget of \$2.7 billion for the Middle East and North Africa region remains equal to the 2019 revised budget approved by the Executive Committee in October 2018, and is \$276.1 million more than the 2018 budget of \$2.48 billion, an increase that can be attributed to the implementation of a lump-sum approach to multipurpose cash programming in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt.

As at 31 January 2019, some 6 per cent of the region's 2019 financial requirements are funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.

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