

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

19 February 2014
English
Original: English and French

Standing Committee
59th meeting

**Overview of UNHCR's operations in the Middle East and
North Africa****A. Situational context***Syria situation*

The humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) remains extremely challenging. More than 2.4 million refugees have already been registered with UNHCR, while governments of the main hosting countries -- Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey -- put the total figure, including unregistered refugees, at around 3 million. On average, 4,900 individuals are being registered per day. In addition, over 31,000 Syrians have sought asylum in more than 90 countries outside the region.

Inside Syria, over 9 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, including an estimated 6.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). The security situation remains volatile, and humanitarian access is an ongoing challenge. Notwithstanding constraints, UNHCR and its partners have expanded interventions to assist millions of displaced Syrians. UNHCR additionally takes the lead in addressing the needs of some 45,000 refugees and asylum-seekers still in the country.

In 2013, UNHCR distributed core relief items to nearly 3.4 million people across Syria. UNHCR participated in 39 inter-agency convoys to hard-to-reach areas including Aleppo, Dara'a, Hama and Homs. In December 2013, with the permission of both the Governments of Syria and Iraq, the United Nations launched its first humanitarian airlift of food and aid supplies from Erbil, Iraq, to Qamishly, in northern Syria. As part of the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP), UNHCR is working to reach 3.5 million beneficiaries inside the country through protection, education, shelter, core relief and health assistance interventions in 2014.

The pace and scale of Syrian displacement to Lebanon has been overwhelming, growing from fewer than 150,000 registered refugees in January 2013 to over 880,000 Syrian refugees in some 1,600 localities at year end. The cumulative economic, social and security consequences of the conflict in Syria and the refugee influx for Lebanon are profound. An assessment by the World Bank/United Nations in 2013 estimated that the total cost of the crisis to Lebanon will reach US\$ 7.5 billion by end-2014.

Jordan currently hosts some 600,000 registered Syrian refugees, constituting over 9 per cent of the total population. Approximately 20 per cent are hosted in refugee camps, with the vast majority hosted by local communities in urban and rural areas. The latter are granted access to public services, including health and education. The surge in population has stretched the authorities' ability to maintain service delivery, resulted in over-crowded labour markets, and induced considerable additional public expenditure. Schools and hospitals are running well beyond capacity, with 77 schools currently operating in double-shifts in order to accommodate Syrian children.

The influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey has surpassed 575,000 arrivals. About 37 per cent of Syrian refugees are accommodated in 22 camps in ten provinces, with the remaining 63 per cent residing in cities across the country. The Government conducts registration and extends temporary protection to Syrians.

Almost 150,000 Syrians were registered with UNHCR in Iraq in 2013. The current Syrian refugee population stands at 213,000, of whom more than 95 per cent are hosted in the Kurdistan Region. The growing number of refugees is exerting additional strains on local infrastructure.

More than 133,000 Syrian refugees are registered with UNHCR in Egypt. However, the Government estimates it hosts some 300,000 Syrians. Refugees are provided with accommodation, food assistance, basic non-food relief items, healthcare and education. A number of Syrian refugees received self-reliance support in 2013, with more expected to benefit in 2014. Some 18,350 Syrians have been registered in other countries in North Africa.

Iraq

The deteriorating security situation in Anbar Governorate early this year has triggered new waves of internal displacement, adding to some 900,000 who already have been displaced for some time. According to the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, over 60,000 families were displaced, either within Anbar Governorate or reaching Baghdad, Babil, Karbala, Salah Al-Din Governorates and Kurdistan Region. UNHCR declared the displacement situation for Anbar a Level 1 emergency at the end of January 2014.

During 2013, the number of Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon decreased by 28 per cent, from 100,000 to 72,000 refugees. The largest reduction was observed in Syria. In order to meet the immediate and mid-term humanitarian needs of increased numbers of returnees, as well as to sustain their return, UNHCR has enhanced its reintegration and self-reliance activities.

Yemen

Yemen continues to face a complex humanitarian situation, characterized by ongoing insecurity, extreme poverty and economic difficulties, which also contributed to reduced access to food, basic services and livelihood opportunities.

Despite challenges, Yemen received a considerable influx of people fleeing from the Horn of Africa across the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. A total of 65,319 persons (including 54,213 Ethiopians and 11,045 Somalis) reached Yemeni shores in search of safety and protection in 2013. The noticeable decrease in the new arrivals figures – down from 107,532 in 2012 – was partly due to migratory regulations implemented in neighbouring countries.

Migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees continued to be smuggled or trafficked, often finding themselves in Yemen without documentation. In the process, many suffered serious human rights abuses. The 243,220 refugees (mostly Somali nationals) have become increasingly vulnerable, relying on available humanitarian support, whilst the operational and security environment hampered regular humanitarian access and delivery.

In parallel, 306,694 Yemenis remained internally displaced across the country, particularly in the North of Yemen. In the southern governorates, by the end of 2013, the majority of individuals displaced by the 2011 events had voluntarily returned to their homes in Abyan, with the support of a coordinated inter-agency humanitarian response.

Onward movements, including protection at sea

The Middle East and North Africa continues to be a region of origin, destination as well as transit for refugees as well as migrants. Countries in North Africa face substantial challenges posed by mixed migratory movements, including smuggling and trafficking of

migrants and refugees, in transit to Europe or other destinations in North Africa. The movement of an increasing number of refugees and migrants by sea are a growing concern.

Libya in particular has experienced a significant increase in the number of persons departing to Europe by sea: over 18,600 departed between January and September 2013, compared to 2,440 in 2012. In Tunisia, UNHCR provided emergency assistance to 600 survivors of boat incidents through the Tunisian Red Crescent.

As the number of Syrians seeking safety in European countries increased in 2013, they, too, have been among those who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean.

B. Achieving the global strategic priorities

UNHCR continues to face challenges posed by the multiple emergencies in the region. Increasingly complex protection issues are emerging, and insecurity is challenging and humanitarian operations and access.

Favourable protection environment

At the core of UNHCR's mandate, protection is an integral component of the overall strategy for the region.

UNHCR has welcomed the growing interest among States in developing national asylum systems. In Morocco, improvements have been made in the situation for refugees and asylum-seekers since September 2013, when the National Council on Human Rights' recommendations for a renewed national migration and asylum policy were followed by Royal directives to undertake necessary reform in migration, asylum and trafficking. This resulted in the reopening of the *Bureau des Réfugiés et des Apatrides* (BRA) and the recognition by Morocco of 532 UNHCR-recognized refugees. In December 2013, the BRA distributed the first Moroccan refugee cards and residence permits to refugees.

In Egypt, UNHCR continues to provide protection and assistance to some 51,800 non-Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly originating from sub-Saharan Africa. The number of newly registered individuals doubled in 2013, to more than 6,000 cases.

In Algeria, UNHCR substantially reduced the RSD backlog, from 1,458 to 252 cases, in 2013.

In the absence of a political solution to the Western Sahara refugee situation, UNHCR ensures its mandate responsibilities and provides protection, assistance and support to 90,000 of the vulnerable Saharawi refugees living in four camps near Tindouf, Algeria.

Family visits between refugees in the camps and their families in the Western Sahara Territory continued as part of UNHCR's Confidence Building Measures (CBM) programme, with an aim to link families divided by the conflict for the past 38 years. Some 2,800 persons participated in 2013, bringing the total number of persons benefitting from these visits to over 19,000 since 2004. Consultations continue on the resumption of flights, suspended since the end of June 2013, to enable over 28,000 registered to benefit from this programme. In addition, UNHCR conducted its 4th cultural seminar in Portugal for 42 refugees and people in the Territory, bringing the total to over 140 beneficiaries since 2011.

In Mauritania, 66,400 Malian refugees were hosted in Mbera camp as of December 2013. The authorities enrolled more than half of these as part of the nationwide biometric enrolment, while UNHCR's biometric registration enrolled 22,300 refugees by the end of December 2013. The registration exercise should be completed in the first quarter of 2014. Since the end of June 2013, UNHCR has been observing small scale spontaneous returns to Mali, with some 2,000 returning in the second half of 2013.

In Israel, UNHCR continues to promote access to RSD procedures, with priorities of improving registration data and RSD process. The implementation of security and legislative measures have affected the number of new arrivals, the protection space and access to basic rights and key services for the 64,000 persons of concern to UNHCR in the country.

In Yemen, UNHCR has continued to work closely with the authorities to implementation of the recently-adopted national IDP policy.

In Iraq, UNHCR is supporting the Government to resolve the prolonged displacement of some 900,000 IDPs, focusing on sustainability through increased attention to self-reliance and community-based activities, as well as capacity building of local NGOs and communities. Interventions in settlements simultaneously tackle needs in the areas of shelter reconstruction/rehabilitation, livelihoods, access to basic services, and access to education. Interventions use a community-based approach, which reinforces coexistence with neighbouring communities. Improving the conditions of IDPs living in sub-standard and slum-like settlements will continue to be a priority.

In Libya, some 59,000 individuals remain internally displaced. In 2013, UNHCR carried out protection monitoring in IDP sites, promoting physical safety of IDPs and supporting their access to basic services, including healthcare and education.

The Office continues to work toward strengthening responses to persons in need of international protection in mixed migratory movements. In November 2013, a regional conference on the challenges of mixed-migration and refugee flows from the Horn of Africa was organized by the Government of the Republic of Yemen, with the support of UNHCR and IOM. Participants from the Horn of Africa and Gulf States, donor countries and international organizations adopted the Sana'a Declaration, aimed at strengthening regional and international cooperation.

Security from violence and exploitation

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) remains a significant protection risk for Syrian refugees. UNHCR is implementing a multi-sectorial, coordinated and community-based approach to prevent and respond to SGBV. All identified survivors are provided with assistance through referral pathways established in all countries of the region. Case management capacity has been steadily enhanced to ensure that response services, including medical, are accessible, safe and confidential.

The Syrian crisis is relentlessly eroding the protective environment for children. UNHCR is prioritizing activities to strengthen national and community-based child protection systems. Investments in children's learning and protection spaces remain a priority to ensure that a future generation of Syrians is not lost.

Durable solutions

UNHCR's commitment to durable and innovative solutions, including self-reliance as a precursor, stands strong in the MENA region. In 2014, the Office will develop an overarching strategy for the harmonization of cash-based programming where possible. Support and solidarity towards host communities will remain essential for the effective implementation of solutions-strategies.

Resettlement remains an important protection tool throughout the region. UNHCR submitted 6,000 Iraqi refugees for resettlement in 2013. In addition, 1,250 Syrian nationals were submitted by UNHCR for resettlement and 4,302 Syrians for humanitarian admissions.

In Camp Hurriya, as of end January 2014, a total of 1,642 individuals have been found to have international protection needs. Of these, 323 individuals were relocated outside of Iraq, including 205 individuals to Albania. Finding durable solutions for this population remains a challenge, and UNHCR continues to call on countries to generously accept these persons in need of international protection.

In Tunisia, the Shousha transit camp officially closed on 30 June 2013. UNHCR provided temporary financial assistance to refugees transferring to urban areas, mainly in the south of the country. UNHCR further launched a livelihoods programme offering access to vocational training and employment opportunities. By the end of 2013, more than 3,500 refugees from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan were resettled as part of the Global Resettlement Solidarity Initiative. Some 81 await departure for resettlement in 2014.

In Egypt, 596 individual refugees remained in Salloum camp, near the Egyptian-Libyan border, at the end of January 2014.

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

UNHCR has strengthened its partnership with countries of the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), which has resulted in unprecedented support to the Syria situation and other operations around the globe. Kuwait generously hosted the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria in early 2014, with participation of donor countries, international and regional organizations. The conference raised total pledges of some US\$ 2.4 billion to fund humanitarian operations inside Syrian as well as in neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees.

C. Financial information

The 2014 MENA budget approved by the Executive Committee (ExCom) at its 64th session has been revised upward from US\$1,532.2 million to US\$ 1,772.6 million. The budget for the Syria situation¹ was increased to from US\$ 1.1 billion to US\$ 1.3 billion as a result of the inter-agency planning processes (Syria Regional Response Plan (RRP5) and Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP)).

The incremental evolution of the 2013 budget for the MENA region saw the initial ExCom-approved budget of US\$ 593 million (including US\$ 115 million for the Syria situation) reach US\$ 1,613.3 million (including US\$ 1.1 billion for Syria situation). At year-end, 74 per cent of the overall needs (OP) for the Syria situation were implemented.

The revised 2013 budget for Yemen ended the year at around US\$ 73 million, which included the supplementary appeal to address the needs of IDPs returning to Abyan. The gap in covering the identified needs for both the IDPs and the refugees stood at 38 per cent by the end of the year.

In 2013, UNHCR appealed for US\$ 283.5 million for the Iraq Situation, representing a 24 per cent reduction over 2012. Only 51 per cent of identified needs were covered.

¹ These figures do not include budgets allocated under the Syria Situation for Turkey and other countries in Europe.