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**Overview of UNHCR's operations in the Middle East and
North Africa (MENA)****A. Situational analysis***Syria/Iraq*

An ever-worsening situation in and around the Syrian Arab Republic has been compounded by events in Iraq during 2014. In view of the impact of current developments on the stability of the region, and the struggle to find a political resolution in the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR will continue to work with partners to contain the deterioration of the regional humanitarian and protection situation.

Syrians have become the largest refugee population under UNHCR's mandate, with some 3.8 million in the region alone. Iraqi refugees number over 200,000 in neighbouring countries, more than half registered in 2014 due to renewed conflict in Iraq.

The prolonged nature of the Syria crisis has required a shift in approach as reflected in the 2015-2016 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP)¹. The 3RP's regional strategy is built on the national response plans of the five main hosting countries, bringing together their governments and almost 200 humanitarian and development partners. It is a unique coordination initiative which aims to scale up resilience and stabilization-based development to complement humanitarian assistance.

Inside the Syrian Arab Republic, 12.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, including 7.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). In Iraq, the estimated number of new IDPs in 2014 reached 2.1 million, with more than 900,000 in the Kurdistan region. Close to one million persons remain displaced in central Iraq as a result of earlier violence.

Inside the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, UNHCR continues to support the IDP inter-agency coordination framework and implementation of the strategic response plans, leading the sectors of protection, camp coordination and camp management, and shelter/non-food items. The Office continues to use all possible means, working across conflict lines, and borders, as authorized under United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2139, 2165 and 2191 (2014), to maximise delivery of assistance and protection inside the Syrian Arab Republic.

In 2014, UNHCR distributed core relief items to 4.5 million people in the Syrian Arab Republic, including over 1.1 million vulnerable IDPs in more than 100 hard-to-reach areas. More than 200,000 people were reached from Turkey and Jordan. In Iraq, UNHCR supported the construction of 10 camps and following needs assessment and protection monitoring provided targeted assistance including psychosocial support, legal assistance, counselling and cash assistance.

¹ Available from <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/the-3rp/strategic-overview/>.

This winter UNHCR and partners launched a major regional assistance operation, supporting more than 1.6 million Syrian refugees with cash, shelter upgrades, stoves, blankets and weatherproofing kits, providing 420,000 IDPs in Iraq with basic domestic items and 500,000 IDPs in the Syrian Arab Republic with winter packages.

Libya

The security situation in Libya remains extremely volatile. According to local authorities and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as of January some 400,000 people were displaced inside the country. This number includes the Tawerghan IDPs displaced in 2011, many of whom were displaced again since fighting started in Tripoli and Benghazi. Within the United Nations humanitarian country team, UNHCR leads all protection-related activities and coordinates the Libya protection working group. The latter was set up for agencies and NGOs working temporarily from Tunis to support national colleagues working inside Libya and to coordinate protection activities and respond to humanitarian needs inside Libya. During the last five months of 2014, UNHCR provided humanitarian assistance to over 27,900 IDPs through two cross-border convoys and in-country mechanisms. UNHCR and partners continue to undertake protection monitoring inside official immigration detention centres, and a hotline run by UNHCR helps with this task. A regional contingency plan is being updated in light of the unstable situation in Libya.

Nearly 37,000 refugees and asylum-seekers are registered with UNHCR in Libya, more than half from the Syrian Arab Republic and the rest from over 30 other countries. Libya is also a major transit country for migrants and asylum-seekers making their way across the Mediterranean to Europe. According to the Italian authorities, some 170,100 persons arrived by sea in 2014, of whom 85 per cent may have departed from Libya.

Yemen

The situation in Yemen remains volatile, with growing protection challenges as a result of weakened rule of law and an increase in trafficking and smuggling. The political impasse deteriorated into renewed conflict, leading to new displacement. In line with the “stay and deliver approach,” UNHCR continues to provide life-saving assistance and critical protection support for both IDPs and refugees. There are currently over 330,000 IDPs and some 248,000 refugees in Yemen. UNHCR is also building local networks, including within the refugee community, to increase response capacity and facilitate access to available protection safety nets.

Yemen continues to be a destination and transit country for people travelling on mixed migration routes. In 2014, some 91,600 persons arrived by sea, marking a significant increase compared with the 65,300 new arrivals recorded in 2013. Of the new arrivals in 2014, some 19,600 were Somalis, 71,900 were Ethiopians and 45 were of other nationalities. In 2014, some 250 people are known to have drowned or disappeared at sea off the shores of Yemen when their overcrowded and unseaworthy boats capsized in high waters.

Onward movements and protection at sea

The Middle East and North Africa continues to be a region of origin, destination, first asylum and transit for refugees and migrants. Trafficking, smuggling and the rising number of deaths at sea are of growing concern. North Africa is particularly affected by migratory movements, including persons in transit to Europe. An increasing number are Syrians, as well as Eritreans, Palestinians and Somalis. Some 15 per cent are minors.

UNHCR strengthened efforts to provide counselling to persons of concern in Libya and Egypt, and engaged with border authorities to prevent *refoulement*. In Tunisia, UNHCR and partners are working on the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for providing protection and assistance to persons rescued at sea. The SOPs will be used by all stakeholders, including government officials.

In order to address the challenges posed by mixed migration in Yemen, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are supporting the Government's implementation of the 2013 Sana'a Declaration. In November 2014, a workshop on

“Protection at Sea - Promoting Cooperation and the Identification of Good Practices” was held in Sana’a with participation from the Government, partners and civil society. The conclusions from the workshop and lessons learned in implementing the Sana’a Declaration provided important inputs to the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection at Sea, which took place in December 2014.

UNHCR contributed to the African Union-Horn of Africa Initiative on Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants, which led to the adoption of the Khartoum Declaration and Plan of Action in October 2014. In November, UNHCR participated in the Rome Conference of the European Union-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative and proposed legal alternatives for solutions to be implemented in support of the Rome Declaration.

B. Achieving the global strategic priorities

Favourable protection environment

In the countries hosting Syrian refugees, UNHCR continued to invest in strengthening national systems, cooperating with the authorities on registration and the renewal of documentation (using biometrics), engaging in community-based protection and strengthening evidence-based protection programming.

In Turkey, the new law on foreigners and international protection and the temporary protection regulation for Syrians were milestones in refugee protection, providing the legal and administrative framework for ensuring that refugees have access to services. In Jordan, the Government extended the validity of refugee certificates from 6 to 12 months.

Morocco is in the process of adopting legislation on asylum. Since June 2014, UNHCR has been working with the authorities on the registration and regularization of refugees. Tunisia is also headed towards the adoption of a legal framework for asylum. UNHCR is supporting the establishment of a national protection system with the provision of training on international refugee law for judges and other actors. In Mauritania, UNHCR organized workshops with the authorities involved in the revision of legislation on asylum. In Israel, UNHCR continues to advocate for asylum-seekers to be treated in line with international refugee and human rights standards.

UNHCR has strengthened its registration and refugee status determination (RSD) capacity in the region. Measures were taken to ensure the efficient registration of refugees upon arrival in the countries of asylum. In 2014, more than 716,000 individuals were registered in the MENA region. After implementation in Jordan and Lebanon, iris-scan biometric technology was deployed to Egypt and Iraq to register Syrian refugees. Other countries, such as Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco use finger-printing biometrics. So far, 69 per cent of refugees in the region have been registered using biometric technology.

In a region facing multiple large-scale displacement situations, methodologies and tools were developed and successfully implemented to increase the RSD processing capacity, particularly in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. In Egypt, RSD was used to determine the protection situation of 85 persons remaining in Salloum camp. They were subsequently relocated to Cairo and the camp officially closed. In Yemen, UNHCR successfully negotiated the release of 172 Eritrean asylum-seekers from detention and assessed their claims for refugee status.

In Mauritania, the first phase of a de-activation exercise for M’bera camp was completed on 31 January 2015. Following the deactivation of nearly 3,600 individuals, there are now some 51,800 remaining in the UNHCR camp database. Work is ongoing, with the current phase planned for completion in June.

Efforts are underway in the region to implement UNHCR’s Global Action Plan to End Statelessness. UNHCR is supporting research to improve data on statelessness and providing technical assistance to States in preventing and reducing statelessness. In terms of prevention, the Office is working with governments to increase birth registration and providing advice on potential law reforms to address gaps in nationality laws. In December 2014, participants from 14 countries and the League of Arab States attended a regional

statelessness workshop in Istanbul organized by UNHCR, Tilburg University and Boğaziçi University. The workshop discussed best practices in preventing and reducing statelessness and UNHCR's Global Action Plan was presented to the participants.

With respect to the Syria emergency, UNHCR is working with the host governments to ensure the timely registration of births; over 115,000 Syrian refugee children have been born in exile since the crisis began. UNHCR has joined efforts with civil society to establish legal aid programmes that assist families in registering new births. In Jordan, these measures, coupled with strong Government support, brought an eight-fold increase in the issuance of birth certificates to children born in camps.

Security from violence and exploitation

In October 2014, a conference² on protecting refugee children and adolescents in the Middle East and North Africa was held in the United Arab Emirates. The conference underscored the importance of child protection, examined ways to strengthen protection systems and raised awareness of the specific risks that children face as a result of forced displacement.

UNHCR continued to standardize best interest assessment (BIA) procedures and support best interest determination (BID) panels for unaccompanied and separated children. By mid-2014, UNHCR and partners conducted more than 4,100 best interest assessments and strengthened BID processes in Yemen and countries affected by the Syria crisis. In Algeria and Tunisia, UNHCR provided technical support to national authorities responsible for BID.

In coordination with partners, UNHCR assisted national authorities in preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) by promoting gender equality, supporting national protection systems and community-based interventions, improving data collection and analysis, and strengthening advocacy. In the countries hosting Syrian refugees, 66,360 survivors of SGBV received specialized support in 2014. In the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR is supporting SGBV prevention and response as lead of the protection cluster, working with partners to ensure that SGBV survivors are receiving counselling, medical support and legal aid. Since 2013, 12,200 SGBV survivors in Damascus have received such support. Psychosocial support was provided to over 8,400 survivors in Iraq. In Lebanon, 70 safe spaces were established for SGBV survivors, who receive skills training and psychosocial counselling.

Durable solutions

UNHCR continues to encourage burden-sharing with countries hosting Syrian refugees through resettlement opportunities or other forms of admission. For 2015 and 2016, 100,000 resettlement places are being sought for Syrian refugees and States are being urged to consider an array of other measures in addition to resettlement programmes. In 2014, UNHCR submitted nearly 23,200 refugees for resettlement from the MENA region. The two largest refugee populations benefiting from resettlement were Syrians and Iraqis. Measures have been taken to ensure the integrity of case data, including through multifunctional anti-fraud assessments.

Owing to security conditions in countries like the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, alternative interview methods, such as digital video conferencing, and the use of emergency transit facilities were expanded. In North Africa, UNHCR is exploring the strategic use of resettlement to address protection needs for refugee survivors of trafficking and SGBV, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals. In Abu Dhabi, UNHCR successfully resettled 46 persons of Tamil origin who were previously rescued at sea.

² The conference was co-organized by UNHCR and The Big Heart Foundation and held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah.

In Yemen, UNHCR adopted a new framework on durable solutions for Somali refugees, which promotes an “out-of-camp” approach, and is working on a pilot project for the voluntary repatriation of some 1,000 refugees to certain areas in Somalia. UNHCR continued to provide protection and assistance to 90,000 vulnerable Sahrawi refugees living in five camps near Tindouf, Algeria. Since its launch in 2004, the confidence-building measures programme has permitted some 20,700 people to benefit from family visits.

In 2015, the “seeds for solutions” project in Mauritania will focus on four key areas: education, livelihoods, peaceful coexistence with host populations, and the protection environment. The project aims to strengthen refugee self-reliance and improve their socio-economic well-being. In Morocco, the Government is working on the integration of recently regularized refugees. In Yemen, UNHCR’s advocacy for mainstreaming basic services into the national system has given refugee children free access to State schools. UNHCR further supported their integration through assistance to schools with high refugee enrolment.

Durable solutions were also prioritized in IDP situations. In August 2014, the IDP durable solutions inter-agency taskforce organized a workshop with relevant stakeholders in Yemen to explore arrangements for the return of IDPs residing in the Mazrak camp.

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

UNHCR capitalized on existing partnerships with the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and built new ones with NGOs and human rights associations in order to advance advocacy on behalf of people of concern. UNHCR’s advocacy with public and private entities in the GCC countries continued to result in substantial contributions for UNHCR operations. UNHCR welcomes the holding of the Third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria to take place in March in Kuwait.

UNHCR is working with the Saudi Red Crescent on the preparation of a workshop on emergency management. In the United Arab Emirates, a similar workshop was held in the International Humanitarian City in Dubai in January 2015. Plans are underway to develop a MENA-wide network of local and regional civil society actors to strengthen advocacy on displacement issues, build national capacities and share lessons learned on an array of issues, including emergency response and protection.

C. Financial information

The revised 2015 budget for the Middle East and North Africa region approved by the Executive Committee in October 2014 was US\$ 1,886.5 million. These requirements were based on mid-2014 estimates and were subsequently revised to US\$ 2,089.3 million, taking into account reductions made to the Syria situation requirements in Jordan and Lebanon and the increase in the Iraq situation requirements resulting from the new Iraq supplementary budget.