

UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs
Geneva 15-17 June
Regional Session: Middle East and North Africa

Background Document

“Protecting future generations in the Middle East and North Africa: A Town Hall conversation”

I. Background

The Middle East and North Africa accounts for more than 35% of global displacement. UNHCR estimates adolescents (10-17) and youth (18-24) make up just under a third of refugees in the region.

Forced displacement has a particularly profound impact on young people in terms of disruption of personal networks, reduced education and employment opportunities, halted or delayed transitions, uncertainty, disenfranchisement and hopelessness. The loss of livelihood, security and protection provided by the family and community places adolescents at risk of child labour, exploitation, sexual or physical violence and discrimination, recruitment into armed forces or groups and early marriage.

Despite challenges, young people continue to demonstrate extraordinary determination and resourcefulness. Most young refugees want to be given the opportunity to contribute to their societies. Key priorities for refugee youth are access to education and livelihoods, safety and protection from violence, exploitation and discrimination, opportunities for meaningful engagement at the community level, and maintaining connections with family and community.

UNHCR’s Regional Approach for adolescents and youth in the Middle East¹ is based on the following Guiding Principles:

- **Participation of young refugees:** Genuine participation and engagement is the foundation of UNHCR’s response to young people.
- **Strengths-based:** The capacities and contributions of adolescents and youth should be recognized and built upon. Opportunities should be provided to young people to further develop their skills, maximize their potential and strengthen their resilience in the face of adversity.
- **Do No Harm:** Avoid exposing youth to further harm and unintended consequences of humanitarian response. In collaboration with young refugees themselves, risks to youth and adolescents should be carefully identified and risk mitigation measures undertaken.
- **Community-based approach:** The strategy acknowledges, supports and builds upon existing family- and community-based mechanisms to protect, support and provide opportunities for adolescents and youth.
- **Complementarity:** UNHCR works in partnership with and complements the efforts by youth, communities, States, civil society, and other UN actors.
- **Systems approach:** Advocating for and supporting the inclusion of refugee adolescents and youth in national, regional and global youth priorities, programmes and initiatives.
- **Social cohesion:** Strengthen integration of refugee adolescents and youth into their communities and implement programmes in a way that addresses the impact of the refugee influx on communities and promotes social cohesion among refugee and impacted communities.

II. Focus of the 2016 Regional NGO session on the Middle East and North Africa

¹ UNHCR Regional Approach for Adolescents and Youth Affected by the Syria and Iraq Crisis

The 2016 Regional NGO session on the Middle East and North Africa will focus on the situation of refugee youth (18 – 24). It will pursue to provide a platform for young refugees to voice their opinion and be heard by the NGO community, UNHCR senior staff, and the international community at large with a view to incorporate their concerns into future humanitarian programs. The session will focus on the following topics:

1. **Education imperatives and challenges to access:** 50% of children and youth are out of school in the MENA region. This is why; multiple pathways to skill acquisition are pursued for young people. Opportunities for secondary education, post-secondary training and skills development provide young refugees with hope and realistic means to fulfil their goals as they transition into adulthood. UNHCR advocates for the development of accredited non-formal education programming designed to cover education needs of young people who have missed out or are unable / unwilling to access formal education. In line with the Global UNHCR Education Strategy, UNHCR further supports access to tertiary education for young refugees on equal terms with nationals. Tertiary education promotes professional development and self-reliance, reinforces protection, develops skill-sets necessary for solutions and enhances peaceful co-existence between refugee and host communities.
2. **Access to labour markets and livelihoods:** Increasing levels of poverty and socio-economic vulnerability among refugees is one of the key factors contributing to young people being unable to continue their education and facing exploitation and abuse, including in the workplace. Addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities of families and providing appropriate livelihoods and self-reliance options for youth above the legal working age play a key role in protection of young refugees. For all adolescents under the legal working age, programmes focus on supporting the families with the aim of reducing risks of child labour while addressing the barriers for refugee children to continue their education. For refugee youth over the legal working age, UNHCR and partners provide range of options including vocational training and access to other livelihood opportunities.
3. **Opportunities for meaningful engagement at the community level:** UNHCR works with refugee adolescent and youth, their families and communities to better protect young refugees. This includes mapping community assets and understanding and supporting existing community-led responses where appropriate as well as building the capacity of adolescents, young people and their families to protect themselves. Programs also include two-way communication to engage young refugees in protection, community consultation and dialogue, identification of positive and harmful attitudes and practices, communication campaigns on key issues and support to agents of change and communities such as youth refugee volunteers and peer educators.

The Middle East and North Africa session will also build upon the conclusions of the UNHCR Global Refugee Youth Consultations in Morocco (January 2016) and Jordan (February 2016), as well as the Regional Framework of Joint Strategic Actions for Young People in the Arab States and Middle East and North Africa Region (2016 – 2017); and the No Lost Generation Initiative.

III. Tentative Session Structure

The Regional NGO Session on the Middle East and North Africa will aim to highlight the massive challenges that young refugees and displaced persons face across the MENA region and will provide a forum to openly discuss responses with regard to protection and solutions of younger generations. The Middle East and North Africa session will follow a *Town Hall* format and portray two panels: 'Humanitarian Workers' and 'Youth'.

Moderator:

- **Moez Masoud**, Television and Radio Presenter

Speakers – “A Conversation with Youth”:

- **Shaden Khallaf**, Senior Policy Officer, UNHCR
- **Youth Representatives (names to be confirmed)**

Speakers – “A Conversation with Humanitarian Workers”:

- **Mr. Abdelbasset Ben Hassen**, President, Institut Arabe des droits de l’Homme, Tunisia
- **Mr. Amin Awad**, UNHCR Director for the Middle East and North Africa
- **Ms. Mariam Farag**, Head of MBC Al Amal, MENA & GCC
- **Ms. Randa Khayat**, Makhzoumi Foundation, Lebanon