

## Protection Working Group Meeting

Tuesday, May 17 2016 – 10:00am – 12.00pm

UNHCR, Zamalek Office

### Summary Notes

---

**1. Attendees:** ACSFT, CARE EFRR, ICRC, PSTIC, StARS, UNHCR and UNICEF

**2. Follow-up on Action Points from the last meeting held on 12 April 2016**

- Focal Points for the Communication Working Group: those PWG members that have not yet done it, to share their designated FPs with the Communication WG.
- UNHCR to share the final list of UNHCR's partners.

**3. Update by UNHCR**

UNHCR gave an update on the latest mixed migration and detention trends as of 31<sup>st</sup> April:

- To UNHCR's knowledge, by 30 April, the total number of persons detained for irregular migration by sea on the North Coast reached **878 persons**, more than doubling the number of persons detained in the same period in 2015 (357 as of 30 April 2015).
- Only in April, **499** refugees and migrants were detained for attempting to depart Egypt irregularly by sea in **16** maritime incidents. This represents an increasing trend as compared to March, with **379** refugees and migrants arrested in **7** maritime incidents.
- The majority of those detained are from **Sub-Saharan Africa**, consisting primarily of Somalis, Sudanese, Eritreans and Ethiopians. **Syrians** are now only 1.3% of all persons involved in maritime incidents in 2016, as compared to 2014 where they were the largest group and the third one in 2015.
- **Adult males** remain the largest group of detainees (55%, 479 individuals), followed by **adult women** (27%, 234 individuals) and **children** (18%, 162 children).
- The number of **children** in detention has increased, representing **18%** of all detainees. Among the **162** children detained, **122** were unaccompanied and separated children. In 2015 children represented 15% of all detainees. Most of the children are undocumented.
- More than **60%** of the detainees arrested in 2016 were registered with UNHCR.
- UNHCR is aware of the release of at least **563** of the 878 detainees. UNHCR recorded the **deportation** of at least **51** persons out of the 878 detainees, most of which occurred in April.
- At least 295 remain in detention as of 30 April 2016. Among this group, there are 15 women and children who remain in prolonged detention since 2015.
- With regards to land border crossings, from January-April 2016, at least **94** foreign nationals (55 Sudanese) were apprehended at **Egypt's Western border** with Libya for attempting to depart Egypt irregularly. At least 10 detainees were registered with UNHCR, of whom 8 were released and 1 was transferred to Qanater Prison.
- UNHCR and partners were denied access to Marsa Matrouh Deportation Center (MDC) in mid-April, where reportedly **29** foreign nationals were detained. Due to continuous advocacy by UNHCR, access to MDC was regained on 10 May.

- The majority of arrests reported for irregular entry through Egypt's **southern border with Sudan** involved Syrian nationals (**133** individuals). UNHCR intervention resulted in the release of 59 Syrian nationals.
- It has also observed that detainees are increasingly **re-attempt to depart by sea** after their arrest and release or even deportation during their first attempt.
- During the month of April, UNHCR observed a new shift by the authorities, by which most of the detainees were **released**, regardless of their registration status with UNHCR, reportedly because of the limited reception capacities at the police stations.
- It is expected that with the existing free-visa regime for Syrians currently in place in Sudan, the increase of irregular entry of Syrians to Egypt through the Sudanese border observed in 2015 and 2016 will continue. UNHCR is aware of 1,454 Syrians that entered irregularly.
- UNHCR has shared a proposal with the authorities to support 16 Police Stations in the North Coast where refugees and migrants are held.
- Since March 2016, UNHCR uses **iris/fingerprint scanners** in Police Stations to verify UNHCR registration status on the spot.

#### Other protection issues:

- Some Ethiopian demonstrators are still involved in a sit-in outside the UNHCR office in 6<sup>th</sup> of October. Meanwhile, as agreed with Ethiopian refugee representatives in April, UNHCR is in the process of reviewing more than 300 pending RSD applications. UNHCR responds to individual demonstrators who show violent behavior by documenting events and concerns, informing the authorities and warning those involved on the need to comply with the laws and regulations of Egypt.
- UNHCR continues to assess the cases of Sudanese asylum-seekers and refugees who were previously in Jordan. UNHCR has registered them and issued them with asylum-seeker cards (Yellow Cards), pending confirmation of their refugee status. A high no-show rate amongst this group has been observed.
- UNHCR has recently registered an increasing number of Syrians who had arrived in Egypt in 2013-2014, were registered with UNHCR, then left Egypt and re-entered Egypt again in 2016. These refugees have had difficulties in obtaining residence permits so UNHCR has added a new feature in their Yellow Cards indicating their re-entry date. UNHCR is following with Immigration on this issue. Partners that are aware of such cases should refer them to UNHCR Protection Unit.
- Improvements in UNHCR registration processes: when new applicants approach UNHCR to withdraw a registration form, they get a Registration Appointment at the same time instead of having to come back to UNHCR office. This is an attempt to facilitate the application process. The criteria on issuing UNHCR Asylum-Seeker Cards (Yellow cards) and Asylum – seekers Certificates for those undocumented has not changed.

#### 4. Unaccompanied and Separated Children and the role of the NCCM

- UNICEF raised the issue of the protection of unaccompanied children in detention and the increasing number of “children on the move” and what can we do in this respect. UNICEF expressed concern about the limited response capacity by the national institutions and noted that the NCCM is only an administrative body (it has no social workers) and its bottleneck is currently in the implementation of the current legislation, including the new

draft Law on Smuggling, where by-laws are still to be developed. PSTIC also noted that its experiences with the NCCM are mixed and CARE noted that it has cooperated with the hotline of NCCM recently.

- UNHCR and UNICEF briefed the PWG about the willingness of the NCCM to tackle the issue of children affected by irregular migration and detention in coordination with international organizations and actors. The NCCM has invited IOM, UNICEF, UNHCR and Save the Children to assist in this process, although it remains unclear the support that can be realistically expected from NCCM.
- UNHCR nevertheless indicated that we need to remain engaged in this new process and that this is a positive step, as the NCCM has the “guardianship” on UASCs affected by smuggling according to the draft law. We need to see both, the immediate and long-term prospects and “to gain” the support of the NCCM in terms of advocacy, liaising with line ministries and provision of assistance and solutions on the ground, regarding identification, release, referrals and care arrangements upon release. Development of by-laws may be a distant objective but UNHCR can offer technical advice with regard to the protection and inclusion of those in need of international protection in the long term. UNHCR stressed the need to continue with the inter-agency response in the north with regards to children in detention. UNHCR inquired on the capacity of PWG partners to provide assistance to children in detention and upon release. UNHCR continues to provide such assistance but its capacity is stretched. UNHCR also regularly updates the Government, advocating for the release of detainees, particularly children, and against deportation.
- UNICEF suggested that we “test the system for unaccompanied children in detention” in a way that could help the NCCM improve on any detected flaws. UNHCR confirmed that 15 unaccompanied or separated children remained in prolonged detention by the end of April, some for more than a year.

#### **5. Inactivation & Closure of Cases by UNHCR**

- UNHCR confirmed that, as part of its regular data cleaning exercises and to keep its refugee data current, it regularly inactivates cases if after multiple attempts to reach the concerned person no contact is established. Currently, cases that are inactivated are those who have lost contact with the office for 12 months and more, do not have received assistance or have missed at least one RSD appointment and could not be reached by UNHCR to schedule another appointment. Those that are closed have lost contact with the office for at least 12 months, have missed RSD appointments and could not be reached, do not receive assistance and, in addition, have expired documents.
- UNHCR encouraged partners to refer cases that they are aware of, where inactivation or closure seems to have been done by mistake. Cases should be sent to the Protection Unit (Ms. Rasha Elshehawy, Assistant Protection Officer, [elshehaw@unhcr.org](mailto:elshehaw@unhcr.org)).

#### **6. Update by PWG members**

- **CARE** noted that its Helpline is overwhelmed. Recent cases include ex- detainees claiming to have been subjected to SGBV while in detention at Cairo Police Stations. **CARE** is now

working in Damietta and is trying to work in Aswan together with partners, but access to persons of concern continues to be limited in Upper Egypt.

- **EFRR** has developed “Birth Certificates” and “SGBV” guidelines. Advice on these guidelines would be welcomed. UNHCR offered to provide its comments. It was noted that comments were already provided by the CPSWG and SGBVSWG.
- **PSTIC** noted that it is currently overwhelmed by new cases. It is also noticing an increase in alleged fraudulent claims. This is making it more difficult to reach those who truly need protection. Local communities themselves also seem overwhelmed by the inflow of those attempting to get to Europe. **PSTIC** also gave an update on its training program for social workers. There are currently 20 social workers benefiting from a 5-week training program. UNHCR is providing training to them.
- **StARS** noted they are also overwhelmed with new request and new arrivals, and that there is a backlog of provision of psychosocial & legal counselling. Depending on the urgency, applicants may need to wait up to 1 month before they can have an appointment. The main groups are Sudanese, Ethiopians and Eritreans. Recently, more Syrians have been seen as well. StARS is also seeing more individuals approaching them for financial assistance and medical problems, some of whom have to be turned away. StARS is trying to do more on-call counselling for protection instead of interviews. In addition, recognized refugees (“UNHCR Blue Card Holders) can do a self-referral for RST if they wish.
- **UNICEF** reported that under its training program for health sector workers, 380 workers were trained aimed at preventing domestic violence. It is also finalizing its Agreement with Caritas to conduct child needs assessments in detention facilities.

## **7. Child Protection Sub-Working Group briefing**

- UNICEF explained that the Child Protection Sub-Working Group (CPSWG), co-chaired with UNHCR, has established a capacity-building task force aimed at strengthen caseworkers through trainings. The CPSWG is currently focusing on UASC and children exposed to abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation. The initial phase of the implementation process of the CPSWG “SOPs on Case Management” concluded in 2015, is being further consolidated towards enhancing quality case management throughout 2016.

## **8. Action Points**

- The PWG will invite other sector leads to the Protection WG for briefings regularly. First suggestion was to invite the Education WG or Resettlement colleagues for the next meeting.
- UNHCR will follow up on the EFRR produced Birth Certificate and SGBV guidelines.
- Partners are asked to continue to refer cases of concern to UNHCR, in particular where inactivation might have occurred by mistake, or where the concerned refugee or asylum-seeker face problems attaining residency permits.
- UNHCR to share the final list of 2016 Partners.

## **9. Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on **June 28, 2016 at 10:00 am**, in the **UNHCR Zamalek** office building.

**UNHCR - June 2016**