

Overview on UNHCR's operations in the Middle East and North Africa

A. Situational context including new developments

Syria situation

As the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic entered its seventh year, internal displacement continued to grow, with 1.3 million people newly displaced in the first half of 2017. By the end of July 2017, over 5.1 million Syrian refugees were registered in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, which showed exemplary generosity. Nevertheless, host countries, contending with mounting demographic, economic, political, security and social pressures, increasingly resorted to border management measures which had an impact on the ability of thousands of vulnerable people to seek safety.

As the lead agency for the shelter and non-food items as well as protection clusters, UNHCR expanded its operations in the Syrian Arab Republic, participating in most of the 27 inter-agency convoys to hard-to-reach or besieged areas in the first half of 2017. These convoys provided assistance to nearly 710,000 people. From January through July 2017, an estimated 600,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) returned to their areas of origin, and UNHCR monitored the return of over 26,000 Syrian refugees from neighbouring countries, scaling up its operational capacity inside the Syrian Arab Republic in support of this.

UNHCR continues to lead, together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in response to the Syria crisis (3RP), coordinating over 240 partners that support the national responses of the five main host countries. Despite ongoing efforts to provide assistance, difficulties accessing services were reported, particularly among Syrian refugees, many of whom have exhausted their savings and live below the poverty line. As of mid-2017, underfunding hindered the provision of essential support to Syrian refugees and the communities that host them.

Iraq situation

Since October 2016, some 1 million individuals have been displaced due to the situation in and around Mosul, mainly in Ninewa Governorate. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s Displacement Tracking Matrix, approximately 240,000 people returned or moved closer to their areas of origin, while the remaining 838,000 individuals remained displaced. As of the end of July 2017, UNHCR had assisted well over half of those displaced (587,000), as well as returnees and members of host communities. Some 75 per cent of these IDPs were assisted in camps.

Against this background, UNHCR will continue to provide shelter, basic household items and protection support to 192,000 individuals remaining in the 19 camps set up or managed by UNHCR and its partners. Ensuring the protection of the displaced and other affected populations, including through safe and sustainable returns, is a critical component of the broader recovery and stabilization efforts in Iraq. UNHCR advocates access to civil documentation and to complete information about the situation in places of origin, as well as supports the efforts of the authorities to reunite separated IDP families

Furthermore, over 257,000 Iraqi refugees are registered with UNHCR in neighbouring countries, with an additional 22,000 individuals who are not yet registered and currently live in camps in Al-Hassakeh Governorate, the majority of whom fled to the Syrian Arab Republic since the start of the Mosul operation. With the fighting now spreading to Tel Afar, also in Ninewa Governorate, Hawiga in Kirkuk Governorate, and east Shirqat in Salah al-Din Governorate, further displacement is expected.

North Africa

The situation in Libya remains volatile, with civilians suffering the consequences of conflict and insecurity. An estimated 1.3 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including some 226,000 displaced Libyans, almost 270,000 returnees¹ and some 42,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. In January 2017, as part of a regional strategy to mitigate protection risks along migratory routes, UNHCR scaled up its operations in Libya in order to provide life-saving protection and assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers and to support Libyan civilians affected by the conflict. Quick-impact projects and cash assistance activities were carried out through partners.

UNHCR, in close cooperation with IOM, also expanded protection monitoring to a total of 12 disembarkation points on the western coast, establishing health posts at six of them. The Office continued to advocate alternatives to detention for refugees and asylum-seekers, including by visiting 30 State-run detention centres and intervening to obtain the release of refugees and asylum-seekers, resulting in the release of over 370 people in 2017 to date. In this regard, negotiations to ensure a better protection of children and other persons at risk continued. Together with the coast guard and immigration authorities, UNHCR also supported the response to the needs of refugees and migrants upon disembarkation. Some 40 refugees were resettled from Libya through private sponsorship or UNHCR's resettlement programme.

In Mauritania, UNHCR continued to assist 52,000 Malian refugees in M'bera camp, aiming at reinforcing their self-reliance. While preparations for the voluntary repatriation of these refugees were under way, large-scale returns are not yet expected due to the unstable situation in Mali, which triggered further displacement into Mauritania since 2016. In Algeria, UNHCR continued to provide assistance to 90,000 vulnerable Sahrawi refugees in the five refugee camps near Tindouf. Funding shortfalls resulted in a reduction of monthly food rations and had a severe impact on the health of the refugees. UNHCR, together with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the refugee community, are working to strengthen livelihoods initiatives, mainly focusing on youth. In Western Sahara, UNHCR maintains minimum operational capacities to resume confidence-building measures once parties agree.

Morocco is increasingly becoming a country of destination for migrants and refugees, and UNHCR is working with the authorities to develop and implement a national asylum system. In Egypt, there was a 44 per cent increase in new registrations in the first half of 2017 when compared to the same period last year. Since January 2017, all refugees and asylum-seekers have access to public health services. The waiting period for refugee status determination has been reduced from five years to 15 months since 2014, following efforts to improve the efficiency of the process by tailoring the procedure to specific nationalities. Furthermore, in 2017, the Office introduced a collapsed registration and refugee status determination procedure to further decrease the waiting period. In Tunisia, UNHCR continued to promote the establishment of a national asylum system and expanded access to public services and livelihood opportunities for refugees.

Yemen

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen, which was compounded by a major outbreak of cholera and the threat of famine, continued to deteriorate in the course of 2017. The deepening decline of Yemen's economic, social, political and security situation has had the greatest impact on civilians, with 20.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance or protection, an increase of some 2 million since the end of 2016. Over 100,000 individuals have been

¹ This refers to returns registered in 2016 and the first half of 2017, according to IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix.

newly displaced since the beginning of 2017, increasing the number of internally displaced to 2 million.

In 2017, UNHCR and partners have observed increased protection needs, with more people than ever resorting to negative coping mechanisms amid widespread food insecurity. In some of the hardest-to-reach areas, UNHCR provided core relief items to nearly 170,000 individuals and shelter kits to over 44,000 people, as well as distributed 7,000 kits designed for returnees. UNHCR also expanded outreach and protection monitoring in favour of IDPs and host communities and offered psychosocial, legal and cash assistance, including rental subsidies to over 64,000 individuals throughout the country.

Yemen is also host to over 280,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Somalia. In 2017, UNHCR assisted and provided protection services to the most vulnerable among them, offering legal services, access to education and health, refugee status determination, detention monitoring and cash assistance. Nevertheless, with conditions deteriorating and protection space diminishing in the country, UNHCR, in cooperation with IOM, Yemeni and Somali authorities, began carrying out an assisted spontaneous return programme to support Somali refugees wishing to return to Somalia.

Mixed and onward movements

Asylum-seekers and refugees continued to travel within large-scale mixed movements from Africa and the Middle East, seeking to reach Europe. UNHCR worked with governments and other partners to improve access to safety and protection from refoulement, and to seek solutions within migration management frameworks in mixed migratory flows. The Office also implemented awareness-raising activities to help persons of concern make informed decisions about the risks of onward movement and their options, including access to protection services and voluntary return.

As of July 2017, fewer refugees and migrants are entering Europe via the Mediterranean routes compared to the first half of 2016, largely due to a drastic decrease in the number of people crossing the sea to Greece. However, the central Mediterranean route to Italy saw 95,200 new arrivals, and the western Mediterranean route to Spain saw an increase of 93 per cent when compared to 2016, with arrivals rising to 12,200 by the end of July 2017. The main nationalities represented among those arriving in Europe are Bangladeshi, Ivorian, Guinean, Nigerian and Syrian.

From January through July 2017, 2,400 refugees and migrants died or went missing crossing the central Mediterranean on unseaworthy vessels, while many others perished in the desert en route or in detention centres. In Yemen, people fleeing persecution or poverty were increasingly targeted and exploited by smuggling and trafficking networks. More than 30,000 people have made their way to Yemen through the Gulf of Aden or across the Red Sea in the first half of 2017 alone. To deal with complex population movements involving shifting routes, UNHCR is proposing a comprehensive strategy with interventions in the countries of origin and transit in Africa and destination countries in Europe, and also appointed a Special Envoy on the Central Mediterranean Situation in June 2017.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Creating a favourable protection environment

Efforts to develop national asylum legislation are underway in the region, including in Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. UNHCR also continued to conduct individual biometric registration for people in need of international protection and, in 2017, expanded or enhanced its use in Algeria, Israel, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. All UNHCR operations in the Middle East and North Africa, with the exception of Libya, now use identity-based management systems.

Community-based protection approaches are central to most of UNHCR's operations in the region and have proven effective in a wide range of responses. Across the Middle East and North Africa in 2017, over 1,100 individuals, including refugees, IDPs and members of host

community, volunteered to support protection responses, and over 350 community centres offered a safe space for the provision of services. With respect to birth registration, UNHCR views it as a key tool to ensure that all children born to persons of concern receive evidence of their legal identity and nationality, and with this in mind, particular attention has been given to preventing statelessness among Syrian children. As a result, UNHCR and partners have significantly reduced the percentage of Syrian refugee children born in the region without any form of identity document from about 35 per cent in 2012 to 3 per cent in 2016.

The education of displaced children and youth plays an important role in the pursuit of durable solutions. Many countries in the region provide access to the national education system to all children, but in practice, some barriers remain for refugees. In North Africa, Arabic-speaking refugee children can enrol in national schools in Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, sometimes with UNHCR's support to refugee families through conditional cash assistance. Despite these developments, nearly 725,000, or 44 per cent, of Syrian refugee children in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt are out of school and face the immediate and long-term consequences of lack of education.

Ensuring protection from violence and exploitation

In 2017, operations in the Middle East and North Africa undertook a range of projects to strengthen gender-sensitive programming with a view to enhancing the inclusivity and accessibility of services. Research on how to address conflict-related sexual violence against Syrian boys and men was completed, as was a report that mapped good practices in promoting gender equality in all areas of humanitarian programming within the 3RP and identified innovative approaches to strengthen the protection response to the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) persons in several key operations, such as Jordan and Lebanon.

Regional coordination was enhanced through active participation in key initiatives, including the "No Lost Generation" (NLG) partnership, which coordinates advocacy on child protection, education and youth issues in the Syria and Iraq situations. In 2017, UNHCR supported the preparation of the NLG's regional strategic framework to address child labour within the Syrian refugee response and a strategic paper on child protection.

In 2017, the operations in the Middle East and North Africa continued outreach to key partners to develop updated analysis of the challenges related to the lack of civil documentation in the Syria situation, noting that coordinated and principled responses should be prioritized to: prevent childhood statelessness; uphold women's rights and security; support family unity and family reunification; facilitate the enjoyment of housing, land and property rights; and enable access to durable solutions. In the countries that belong to the Gulf Cooperation Council, the strategic use of refugee status determination and resettlement helped protect and find solutions for a limited number of urgent protection cases, often involving survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Achieving durable solutions

By July 2017, the cases of nearly 29,000 refugees from the region were submitted for resettlement, including 25,530 Syrian refugees and 1,150 Iraqi refugees. With an overall target of 67,000 resettlement submissions for 2017, UNHCR advocates for increased quotas for Syrians and others with a view to promoting refugee protection space in the region. UNHCR is also seeking durable solutions for refugees in Libya and is advocating for complementary pathways of admission, such as humanitarian visas, private sponsorships, academic scholarships and labour mobility schemes. In 2017, UNHCR began piloting projects on refugee family reunification and measuring the impact that family separation has on refugee protection and solutions in select operations, in line with the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.

In the Syria situation, some progress was achieved towards meeting the goal of securing by 2018 a cumulative total of 510,000 resettlement spaces and other forms of admission for about 10 per cent of registered Syrian refugees. Over 254,000 places were made available as of 30 April 2017. From January through May 2017, approximately 450,000 IDPs returned to their places of origin inside the country, although some may have been displaced again.

With respect to refugee returns from neighbouring countries, UNHCR is monitoring the situation, as conditions for safe and dignified returns are not yet in place. The Office continues to advocate the continued protection of Syrians in need of international protection. In Mali, despite the signature of a peace agreement in 2015 and a tripartite agreement on voluntary return signed by Mali, Mauritania and UNHCR, voluntary return from Mauritania to Mali remained limited due to insecurity, with fewer than 300 Malian refugees from M'bera camp repatriating between January and July 2017.

Mobilizing support through strategic partnerships

UNHCR continues to reinforce strategic partnerships with civil society, the private sector, and academic institutions in the region with a view to strengthening its ability to generate public support and influence public discourse. In line with the New York Declaration and the comprehensive refugee response framework, which emphasize the need for “whole-of-society” response structures to large-scale displacement, UNHCR supports the growing Middle East and North Africa Civil Society for Displacement Network, which provides a unique platform for regional coordination, advocacy and capacity-building.

UNHCR has also designed a strategy for partnerships, advocacy, and communications in the region and held a roundtable for academia in order to support the production of knowledge and dissemination of information on refugee protection in Arabic. The aim is also to strengthen evidence-based policy-making on refugee issues and better inform public opinion.

Together with the private sector, UNHCR is pursuing new approaches to fundraising and developing entrepreneurship training programmes with companies which support livelihoods and the self-reliance of refugees and their host communities across the Middle East and North Africa region. Engagement with regional organizations, including the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, is also ongoing, with a series of joint activities undertaken and planned in follow-up to the New York Declaration.

C. Financial information

In October 2016, the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom) approved the 2017 budget of \$2,170.7 million for the Middle East and North Africa region. As of 31 July 2017, the 2017 budget for the Middle East and North Africa region decreased by \$115.9 million due to the realignment of the inter-agency Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in response to the Syria crisis (3RP). Increases were also recorded following the establishment of supplementary appeals for the Libya and Somalia situations. As of 31 July 2017, voluntary contributions earmarked for the Middle East and North Africa region amounted to \$718.3 million.

During the 2018-2019 biennium, the projected financial needs amount to \$2,168.1 million and \$2,205.5 million for 2018 and 2019 respectively. The budget for 2018 is slightly reduced when compared to the initial 2017 budget of \$2,170.7 million.