

**UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs
Geneva, 1-3 July 2015**

Regional Session: Middle East and North Africa Session (MENA)

**Thursday 2 July 2015 – 14h30 – 18h30 – Room 3
Background Paper**

“Investments for Solutions in Protracted Displacement Crises”

Background and Context

Forced displacement across the globe has risen to dramatic levels over the past year, reaching unprecedented numbers. As a result of the crisis in Syria and Iraq, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has now become the region hosting the largest number of refugees under UNHCR’s mandate worldwide. Whether as countries of origin, countries of asylum, or countries of transit, most countries in the region have become affected by displacement. The long-standing and well-established culture of hospitality and generosity has contributed to welcoming large numbers of persons seeking safety, and sharing spaces and resources.

The region hosts more than 19 million displaced persons, including 5 million Palestine refugees under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), almost 4 million Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR, 7.6 million internally displaced Syrians and 2.9 million internally displaced Iraqis. Yemen, where the humanitarian situation was already fragile, now hosts over 1 million internally displaced persons in Yemen due to recent developments in the country. In addition, countries in North Africa are particularly affected by mixed migratory movements, with increasing tragedies occurring at sea every day.

While efforts for finding political solutions to the conflicts ravaging the region are on-going by a multitude of stakeholders, UNHCR and partners continue to work towards ensuring that refugees, internally displaced persons, and the communities hosting them are at the centre of strategic plans for protection and assistance. In order to respond to protracted displacement crisis, a wide range of existing partnerships are being deepened, while new partnerships are being developed simultaneously with the expanding array of emerging humanitarian actors operating nationally and regionally across MENA. Innovative approaches also continue to be sought and promoted to address both the immediate protection and assistance needs of refugees, as well as the communities hosting them over the longer term. A number of key strategic policy priorities remain vital in this respect, including:

- **Country-driven, regionally coherent responses:** UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), together with over 200 partners across the region, are co-leading the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP). These country-driven, regionally coherent plans, in which the needs and priorities of vulnerable populations, refugees and members of impacted communities are central to the response, offer an integrated approach, combining protection and humanitarian relief efforts with more focus on supporting the national plans of the five main refugee-hosting countries neighboring Syria and development interventions to build resilience among communities and institutions across sectors. It is a unique coordination initiative which aims to scale up resilience and stabilization-based development to complement humanitarian assistance.
- **Protecting children and youth:** Refugee children and adolescents face a number of protection risks including unaccompanied and separated (UASC) children, child labour, child marriage, sexual and physical violence against children, detention of children, trafficking, lack of documentation for children, and children associated with armed groups or forces. The refugee child protection strategy aims at strengthening national child protection systems, engaging families and communities to act as agents of protection, and the provision of specialized services to children with specific protection risks.
- **Birth registration:** Increasing birth registration and access to civil status documentation forms a central component of the MENA approach to statelessness given the increased risks of statelessness to unregistered children due to conflict, displacement, family separation, and gaps in documentation. For States that are parties to Statelessness Conventions, advocacy will focus on developing national legal or policy framework. MENA has the largest number of States that maintain gender discriminatory nationality laws that increase the risk of statelessness among refugee children when their fathers are unable to assist them in acquiring nationality or proof of nationality. UNHCR continues to work with governments as it promotes UNHCR's global campaign to remove gender discrimination from nationality law.
- **Education:** The education sector across the region faces major challenges, with significant needs in terms of access, quality and capacity of education systems in impacted countries. There are a range of key factors contributing to low enrolment and attendance rates and to poor learning, ranging from policy and bureaucratic regulations, with many children failing to attend age-appropriate classes or to provide documentation for school registration, which many families no longer have or are unable to obtain. Access to quality education mitigates protection risks such as child labour, early marriage, unaccompanied children and other protection concerns. There is a profound strain on resources, capacity and planned education reforms, with the most marginalized groups bearing a disproportionate burden as a result. Investing in primary and secondary education for both refugee and host community children and youth is an investment in their future that will prepare them for more durable solutions when conditions are conducive, and build stronger social cohesion with host communities in the meantime. Access to higher education likewise serves as a strong incentive for students to continue and complete their

studies at the primary and secondary levels, while contributing to solutions and post-conflict reconstruction projects.

- **Strengthening community-based protection response:** Engaging in community based protection offers dividends for all actors involved in the humanitarian response through the support of formal and informal networks in identifying the most urgent needs of both refugees and host communities, potentially through the improvement of national protection services and fostering improved co-existence. With high proportions of refugees living in urban, peri-urban and rural settings dispersed in large geographic areas, community outreach is a challenge. In the Syria context, the 3RP encourages the use of community-based protection approaches, including working with community outreach volunteers and community committees, support to community centres as platforms for the delivery of services, and supporting community-based protection and response networks, and other community initiatives.
- **Building resilience:** Along with efforts to strengthen local and national systems and improve service delivery for all, an important dimension of building resilience is expanding livelihoods and employment opportunities for vulnerable men, women and, especially, youth, in compliance with national laws and regulations, and in line with national priorities. Interventions include options for livelihoods stabilization aiming to equip households and communities with coping mechanisms through temporary employment for youth and women through labour intensive methods such as the rehabilitation of key community socio-economic infrastructure, including markets and roads, skills and vocational training to increase employability. A second track includes interventions designed to generate employment opportunities through addressing rehabilitation/restoration needs of the local economy, promoting access to financial capital for sustainable Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) development, investing in socio-economic infrastructure and local institutions, and restoring the natural resource base. It also includes creating partnerships between public and private institutions at local level to improve social dialogue and economic collaboration for both refugees and host communities.

In light of the above-described context and with the current regional strategic priorities, and with due consideration to the current complexity of identifying durable solutions for the majority of refugees across the region, the MENA session of this year's Annual Consultations with NGOs will address the importance of investing in refugees while in exile, to better prepare them for solutions. This approach requires a shift in perception and approach from refugees as a burden, to refugees as engaged participants in their communities. The role of NGOs and civil society actors in advocating for wider protection space and to involving key local and regional actors across MENA is critical in this regard.

Tentative Session Structure

I - Overview and General Discussion

This session will aim to highlight the massive challenges across the MENA region, generated largely by armed and increasingly inter-connected conflicts. Noting that growing humanitarian needs are likely to continue to exceed available resources where refugees settle in urban, peri-urban and rural communities, it will discuss how responses can increasingly become more sustainable and centered around persons of concerns' holistic needs, as well as those of their host communities, as displacement persists. The session will also discuss challenges in mixed migration contexts.

Speakers:

- **Amin Awad**, MENA Bureau Director, regional overview and strategic partnerships
- **Khaleb DIAB, Qatar Red Crescent Society**: on the role of new actors on the region and in wider engagement of civil society in the search for durable solutions
- **Mr. Bruno Atieh, Caritas Lebanon**: on the challenges and opportunities of providing protection and assistance for refugees and host communities
- **Mr. Ramy Salhi, Tunisia Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network**: working on durable solutions and outcomes in responding to mixed migration

COFFEE BREAK

II – Specific Discussions:

This session will provide an opportunity to share best practices in ensuring refugee child protection as well as to follow-up on the Investing in the Future Conference held in Sharjah, UAE, in October 2014, during which a number of key refugee child protection principles were identified as priorities, including education and birth registration. As highlighted in Sharjah, investing in child protection enables the next generation to better contribute to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of their country of origin when conditions become conducive for voluntary repatriation.

The discussion will also highlight the advantages of community-based protection and the increasing need to find innovative local solutions to needs which would benefit refugees and host communities alike. Participants will be encouraged to share good practices in relation to fostering opportunities for self-reliance, as well as discussing avenues for economic empowerment within frameworks and contexts which address national economic priorities of host countries.

A. Refugee child protection across the region as an investment in the future and for eventual solutions

Speakers:

- **Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development Jordan:** on birth registration and the contribution of national NGOs to protecting refugee children
- **Mr Rachid BADOULI, Morocco Foundation Orient Occident:** on child protection challenges and education opportunities

B. Fostering self-reliance: Enabling refugees and their communities

Speakers:

- **Mr Salah MAJID, Iraq, Harikar NGO:** on the role of refugees in local markets and sustainability
- **Christopher EADES, St Andrew's Refugee Services Egypt:** on the graduation from poverty model