

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner’s Programme**

1 March 2017
English
Original: English and French

Standing Committee
68th meeting

**Update on UNHCR’s operations in the Middle East and
North Africa (MENA)****A. Situational context including new developments****Syria situation**

The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to drive large-scale displacement, bringing the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to some 6.3 million and the number of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey) to over 4.9 million as at February 2017. Intense fighting in the northern parts of the country, especially in Aleppo, led to civilian casualties and the displacement of over 400,000 people over the last year. A temporary cessation of hostilities in late December 2016 provided an opportunity to assess critical humanitarian needs in Aleppo, as well as in Idlib and Jibreen, with food, water, shelter and health care remaining urgent priorities. Overall, the lack of safe and unimpeded humanitarian access remained extremely challenging, and some 13.5 million people were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance, including 4.72 million in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. UNHCR strengthened its leadership and coordination role in the protection, shelter/non-food items (NFIs), and camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) clusters. In 2016, as part of the “whole of Syria” response, UNHCR delivered protection assistance to more than 1 million people, NFIs to some 2 million people, and health services to over 480,000 people.

Despite the continued generosity of host governments and communities, many Syrian refugees had exhausted their savings and were facing poverty. In some countries, refugees encountered increasing barriers to accessing public services, including with respect to food, housing and health care. In Lebanon, 70 per cent of refugee households were living below the poverty line in 2016, up from 50 per cent in 2014. In Jordan, 90 per cent of Syrian refugees surveyed were living below the poverty line, up from 86 per cent in 2015. Together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNHCR continued to lead the “Regional refugee and resilience plan” (3RP), a coordinated response of over 240 partners in support of the national response plans of the five main refugee-hosting countries. The 2017-2018 3RP was launched in Helsinki on 24 January 2017 for a total US\$ 4.63 billion.

Notwithstanding these challenges, and in line with commitments made at the February 2016 conference on “Supporting Syria and the region”, there were positive developments in terms of access for Syrian refugees to education and livelihood opportunities. In Turkey, 10,000 work permits were granted to Syrian refugees in 2016, while in Jordan, over 37,000 work permits were issued without fees to Syrian refugees by the end of 2016. Syrian refugee children had increasing access to formal or informal education in many host countries, including in Jordan where the level reached 82 per cent. The upcoming conference in Brussels will provide a further opportunity to advocate for high-level funding commitments and continued advances in the areas of protection, educations and livelihoods; and support to host countries, host communities and refugees.

Iraq situation

Since January 2014, some 3 million people have been internally displaced in Iraq, adding to the 1 million people who were displaced between 2006 and 2007. An additional 162,000 were

internally displaced from Mosul and its surrounding areas between mid-October 2016 and the start of January 2017. Over 10 million Iraqis were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance. The Middle East and North Africa region was host to over 245,000 registered Iraqi refugees, more than half of them in Turkey.

Although a number of international organizations scaled-up activities in hard-to-reach areas in the governorates of Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din, most front-line services in such areas continued to be provided by national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations. With respect to the Mosul operation, which started in October 2016, the Iraqi security forces sought to ensure that the protection of civilians was central to military strategy. Despite these efforts, the complexity and duration of the operation led to a siege situation, with significant impact on civilians including limited access to food, water and medical services.

At the end of 2016, there were 21 camps hosting IDPs from northern Iraq, supported by the Ministry of Migration and Displacement, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Despite this, more space to accommodate IDPs was needed, and UNHCR and the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator continued to advocate for additional land to set up new camps and reception centres. In addition to providing material assistance, counselling, and legal services, UNHCR worked to ensure that displaced Iraqis had access to civil documentation and complete information about the situation in their places of origin. The Office also supported the authorities in their efforts to reunite families that were separated during the conflict.

North Africa

The volatile political and security situation in Libya continued to severely impact civilians, in particular an estimated 240,000 IDPs and an estimated 100,000 refugees and asylum-seekers inside Libya.

Humanitarian access in Libya remained a key challenge, with international staff still continuing to work remotely from Tunisia as has been the case since mid-2014. In light of this, UNHCR sought to further expand its partner network to reach persons of concern across the country. Over 4,000 internally displaced families received core relief items in 2016. UNHCR also reinforced its activities for refugees in Libya and opened a third community development centre, located in Tripoli. The Office continued to run information and reporting hotlines, responding to over 3,000 calls in 2016.

To improve coordination, UNHCR and IOM established a mixed migration working group in December 2016. UNHCR had regular or ad hoc access to 15 of an estimated 22 State-run detention centres throughout Libya. The Office advocated the release of people in need of international protection and vulnerable cases and successfully obtained the release of 580 people in 2016. UNHCR also provided basic assistance to detainees, such as core relief items, as well as medical care.

Since September 2016, more than 4,500 people have crossed into Mauritania from Mali, fleeing renewed violence and insecurity. UNHCR continued to assist more than 46,000 Malian refugees in Mbera camp in Mauritania, while registering and providing emergency assistance to new arrivals. UNHCR continued to focus on self-reliance initiatives as well as on replacing and maintaining camp infrastructure, given that large-scale voluntary returns to Mali remained unlikely in the short term.

In Egypt, some 75,000 refugees and asylum-seekers of various nationalities (notably from Ethiopia, Iraq and Sudan) were registered with UNHCR, in addition to 115,000 Syrian refugees. UNHCR worked with the Egyptian authorities to secure access to public services for all refugees and asylum-seekers.

UNHCR continued to provide assistance to the most vulnerable Sahrawi refugees in the five camps located near Tindouf, Algeria. UNHCR coordinated with United Nations agencies and other partners to provide an overview of requirements in the camps, while also investing in livelihood opportunities, particularly for youth. Despite inter-agency fundraising efforts and donor meetings held in Algiers in September 2016 and in Geneva in November 2016, funding

shortages continued to hamper the provision of essential assistance, notably food. With respect to UNHCR's confidence-building measures, which were suspended in 2014, the Office is ready to carry out these activities as soon as the parties agree on resumption.

Yemen

The conflict in Yemen continued to deteriorate, with 2 million persons displaced inside the country and 182,000 who sought refuge in other countries in the region. An estimated 18.8 million people, out of a total population of 27.4 million, were in need of humanitarian assistance inside Yemen, with food being the most pressing need. The system-wide level-3 emergency response remained in place.

Despite the ongoing conflict in the country, Yemen continued to host some 278,880 registered refugees and asylum-seekers. In order to manage the pressing needs inside Yemen, UNHCR adopted the following six strategic areas of focus: 1) a protection response for people of concern to UNHCR; 2) the continued provision of life-saving assistance; 3) collaboration with IOM on the evacuation of Somalis; 4) the continued protection of IDPs, within the framework of the cluster system; 5) an assisted spontaneous return plan for Somalis from Yemen; and 6) an enhanced information campaign on the risks of irregular movements to Yemen. The latter two issues will be addressed through a comprehensive regional initiative and with the support of the High Commissioner's Special Envoy for the Somali refugee situation.

Mixed and onwards movements

Large-scale irregular mixed movements from, to and through the Middle East and North Africa region continued in 2016. UNHCR worked to safeguard access to territory and protection for persons of concern to the Office, including protection against refoulement.

The central Mediterranean route (through North Africa to Italy) remained the main corridor used by people seeking to reach Europe from Africa, with over 181,400 arrivals by sea in 2016; the vast majority of people departed from Libya. The profile of those moving along this route was mixed, with significant numbers from Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Gambia, Guinea and Nigeria. The gender and age profiles varied significantly among nationalities, with an increased proportion of women among those of Nigerian and Somali origin (between 25 and 29 per cent of arrivals), for example. There were also a high number of unaccompanied and separated children from Eritrea (18 per cent of all Eritrean sea arrivals). In total, over 5,000 people were reported to have died or gone missing in the Mediterranean in 2016.

Despite the unpredictable and challenging security situation, UNHCR continued to strengthen cooperation with the Libyan coast guard and immigration authorities, including through participation in training by EUNAVFOR, the European Union Naval Force. UNHCR also expanded the number of health posts, from three to five, at disembarkation points in Libya to provide emergency assistance to persons of concern rescued at sea. UNHCR successfully advocated the release of refugees detained as a result of their irregular entry or presence and provided life-saving humanitarian assistance in detention facilities and at points of disembarkation, following rescue or interception at sea. In Tunisia, UNHCR continued to provide capacity-building for the authorities and to carry out monitoring at the border with Libya.

The number of refugees and migrants using the eastern Mediterranean route (from Turkey to Greece) in 2016 dropped dramatically following the effective "closure" of the Balkans route. Some 173,500 arrivals were recorded in Greece in 2016, with a large proportion from the Syrian Arab Republic (47 per cent).

Some 111,500 people crossed to Yemen from the Horn of Africa between January and November 2016. This represented an increase of 20.6 per cent compared to 2015, despite heightened conflict and insecurity in Yemen. Some 83 per cent of arrivals were from Ethiopia, with the rest coming from Somalia. UNHCR's overall objective in Yemen was to safeguard existing asylum space, within the broader context of mixed movements.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Creating a favourable protection environment

With the view to support the development of legislative and administrative asylum frameworks, UNHCR continued to advise countries developing draft national asylum legislation, in particular Morocco and Tunisia. The Office worked closely with the League of Arab States on a draft Arab Convention on regularizing the refugee situation in the Arab region. In Israel, UNHCR continued to advocate for access to legal status and to promote solutions.

UNHCR continued to conduct individual biometric registration for persons in need of international protection throughout the region. In Turkey, UNHCR supported the Government in the development of a project to verify the registration data of Syrian refugees. The Office conducted refugee status determination under its mandate, while also implementing activities designed to safeguard the integrity, quality and efficiency of the process.

In October 2016, the League of Arab States and UNHCR jointly convened a regional meeting on belonging and legal identity. Participants adopted recommendations on achieving universal birth registration, enhancing civil registration capacity and further aligning nationality laws with international standards. Within the framework of the 3RP, UNHCR continued to prioritize efforts to ensure all refugee marriages and births were registered and documented.

In close collaboration with partners, UNHCR continued to invest in the capacity of displaced people and communities to act as agents of their own protection. In the Syrian Arab Republic, some 120,000 individuals received direct assistance and services through over 800 community-based and community-led initiatives. Community centres served vital roles in many operations, including in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey, allowing communities to receive information and services. Over 150 community centres were in place across the region to assist refugees, IDPs and host communities.

Existing cooperation with key regional partners was nurtured, in particular with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council, and UNHCR continued to advocate that refugees, particularly Syrians, residing in member States be protected against refoulement and assisted in accessing basic services.

Ensuring protection from violence and exploitation

Child protection remained an important part of UNHCR's response in the region. Key priorities included strengthening national child protection systems and ensuring non-discriminatory access to these systems, as well as enabling quality services for refugee children who had been separated from their families or who had experienced violence, abuse or exploitation. In 2016, over 692,000 girls and boys benefited from UNHCR's child protection or psychosocial support programmes. The International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNHCR, in consultation with partners from the "No Lost Generation" initiative, are working on a regional strategy to address child labour among refugees in the context of the response to the Syria crisis. Consultations took place with refugee youth in Algeria, Morocco and Turkey to improve youth-inclusive programming. UNHCR and partners supported a range of youth-led initiatives at the community level and facilitated refugee youth participation in regional and global events, including through youth consultations in Jordan, Morocco and Turkey in the lead up to the Global Refugee Youth Consultations in Geneva.

UNHCR continued to prioritize the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In the countries covered by the 3RP, almost 131,500 survivors of SGBV, including men and boys, were given access to multi-sectoral services. In 2016, UNHCR identified good practices in promoting gender equality in humanitarian programming and addressing SGBV in the region. The findings will be included in a report containing lessons learned and recommendations, to be released in 2017. UNHCR completed a study on sexual

violence against refugee men and boys, to help ensure that laws, policies and services are inclusive of their needs. The safe collection and management of data on SGBV incidents was strengthened through the use of the gender-based violence information management system (GBVIMS) as part of the 3RP.

Achieving durable solutions

In 2016, nearly 96,000 refugees from the region were submitted for resettlement, including approximately 76,000 Syrian and 12,000 Iraqi refugees. UNHCR advocated for increased quotas, including for refugees currently hosted in countries in conflict, such as Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, as well as for Palestinian refugees in Iraq.

In line with the high-level meeting on pathways for admission of Syrian refugees, held in Geneva on 30 March 2016, there was progress towards meeting the goal of cumulatively establishing 480,000 places for resettlement and other forms of admission from 2013 to 2018, with over 220,000 places being made available by August 2016.

UNHCR also advocated other pathways for admission of refugees to third countries, such as humanitarian visas, community-based private sponsorship, labour mobility schemes and family reunification, including for extended family members. A series of activities were undertaken in this area, including the training of consular staff from countries with humanitarian visa programmes, who were based in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

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

UNHCR capitalized on existing partnerships, including with regional organizations. Initiatives included the organization of a briefing for member States of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and support for the holding of an extraordinary meeting of the Arab Regional Consultative Process of the League of Arab States, in preparation for the high-level plenary summit of the United Nations General Assembly on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants in September 2016. UNHCR also forged new partnerships, including with the British Council, to address challenges affecting access by refugee youth to tertiary education.

Consultations took place with more than 150 representatives from civil society across the region, with a view to establishing a region-wide network of local and regional civil society actors. The first meeting of the founding members of the MENA Civil Society Network for Displacement took place in Qatar on 22 February 2017. The objective of the network is to strengthen advocacy on displacement issues, build national non-governmental response capacities, and share lessons learned on an array of issues, including emergency response and protection. Members include civil society from across the region, including representatives from NGOs, media, academia and private sector.

UNHCR also continued to strengthen strategic partnerships in the region with the private sector, local and regional media outlets, and academic institutions. The UNHCR Advisory Council for the Middle East and North Africa, set up to increase the Office's engagement with the private sector, held its second meeting in November 2016, including a field visit to Zaatari camp in Jordan. Partnerships with leading Arabic-language regional media have increased, including through capacity-building activities and direct engagement with senior media correspondents.

A total of US\$ 2.7 billion was mobilized on behalf of over 200 partners under the 3RP in 2016. UNHCR continued to co-lead the 3RP, coordinating the US\$ 4.63 billion 2017 appeal that was released in December 2016.

C. Financial information

As of 31 January 2017, the budget for the MENA region for 2017 stood at US\$ 2.05 billion, including the responses to the Iraq, Syria and Yemen situations. This represented

US\$ 116.3 million less than the budget of US\$ 2.17 billion approved by the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme at its sixty seventh session in October 2016, due to reductions in the budgets of the operations in Jordan and Lebanon. These reductions were made as a result of in-depth, country-wide, inter-agency consultations held in the context of the finalization of the 2017-2018 3RP. These consultations were concluded ahead of the consolidated appeal to support people affected by disaster and conflict, the Global Humanitarian Overview for 2017, which was released on 6 December 2016.

The 2017 budget for the region was US\$ 30.7 million less than the 2016 budget, as at 31 December 2016.

In 2016, contributions for the MENA region amounted to US\$ 1.29 billion, or 62 per cent of the 2016 overall requirements of US\$ 2.09 billion. As of 31 January 2017, contributions totalling US\$ 92 million (4 per cent) towards the region's 2017 financial requirements have been recorded.
