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High Commissioner’s Programme**

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Update on UNHCR’s operations in the Middle East and North Africa

A. Situational analysis including new developments

Syria situation

The Syria crisis, currently in its 11th year, remains the largest displacement situation in the world with over 5.6 million Syrian refugees registered in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) brought significant economic and social distress which negatively impacted refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their host communities. While host governments and the international community stepped up their support for Syrians in response, the challenging socioeconomic situation exacerbates the vulnerabilities of refugees and their host communities, IDPs, returnees and other persons of concern to UNHCR in 2022.

Inside the Syrian Arab Republic, significant humanitarian needs persist. As part of the “whole-of-Syria” response, UNHCR is a co-leading agency of the protection, shelter and camp coordination and camp management cluster responses, UNHCR focuses on multisectoral assistance, including core relief items and shelter support, as well as strengthening its community-based protection approach.

In cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme, UNHCR is coordinating the work of more than 270 partners in support of national efforts in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey as part of the [Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan \(3RP\)](#), which aims to connect the humanitarian response with longer-term national strategies for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Approximately 35,000 refugees returned voluntarily to the Syrian Arab Republic in 2021, with similar rates of return expected to continue. An [intention-to-return survey](#), conducted in March 2021, indicated that while most Syrians wished to return (70 per cent), only a small number planned to do so within the following 12 months (2.4 per cent).

Over 610,000 Syrians have been identified with resettlement needs in 2022, representing the highest number of resettlement cases globally. As the situation develops in the Syrian Arab Republic, resettlement will remain a critical demonstration of responsibility-sharing by the international community over the coming year.

Iraq

UNHCR's strategy in Iraq focuses on further strengthening the economic and social inclusion of persons of concern, in line with a gradual shift from a purely humanitarian response to a longer-term development approach. The needs of some 1.2 million IDPs and 4.9 million returnees are compounded by constraints such as the lack of civil documentation, access to basic services; destroyed or damaged property and critical infrastructure; a shortage of livelihood opportunities and financial resources in areas of return. At the same time, economic, political and security challenges remain, many of which have been aggravated by the impact of COVID-19.

UNHCR promotes the systematic inclusion of persons of concern in social protection schemes and safety nets by strengthening access to national services and employment opportunities, identifying comprehensive protection and solutions strategies and promoting the sustainability of return through small-scale infrastructure projects. As co-leading agency for the protection, camp coordination and camp management and shelter clusters for the IDP response, UNHCR will continue to enhance proactive engagement with IDPs on durable solutions, including facilitating voluntary return when feasible and advocating for alternatives for those for whom return is not viable. Access to civil documentation for IDPs and returnees through legal assistance and capacity-building of relevant institutions remains a priority.

In addition, UNHCR provides protection and humanitarian assistance to an estimated 276,000 Iraqi refugees registered in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey. Almost 38,000 Iraqis are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2022. UNHCR adopts and advocates for an inclusive “one refugee approach” for all refugees and asylum-seekers under UNHCR’s mandate, which seeks to eliminate differences in rights and services based on nationality.

North Africa

In Libya, hostilities between warring parties largely subsided. However, despite peace efforts led by Libya and facilitated by the United Nations, the situation remained uncertain following the postponement of presidential elections originally scheduled for December 2021.

In this context, the overall humanitarian situation improved with a reduction in the total number of people in need, including a decrease in the IDP population from 278,000 in January to 200,000 in October 2021. A further reduction is expected in 2022 based on return trends. The number of refugees and asylum-seekers dropped from 47,100 in January to 42,400 in December 2021, though the population is projected to slightly increase in 2022. UNHCR faced considerable operational difficulties during the second half of 2021. Following raids on districts hosting migrant and asylum-seeking populations, widespread demonstrations outside UNHCR premises resulted in the closure of the Community Day Centre run by UNHCR in Tripoli. Notwithstanding restricted access, particularly for emergency evacuation and resettlement activities, UNHCR is committed to providing protection and assistance to IDPs, returnees, refugees and asylum-seekers, including those in detention centres and at disembarkation points.

Tunisia has witnessed a rise in both arrivals and onward movements. The number of refugees and asylum-seekers increased for a third consecutive year, with 9,255 registered as of December 2021 (up from 6,400 in 2020 and 3,300 in 2019), the majority originating from Côte d'Ivoire and the Syrian Arab Republic. UNHCR will deliver protection assistance to people of concern including those disembarked at sea, while working with partners to expand the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Egypt hosts some 270,000 refugees and asylum-seekers of different nationalities, while maintaining a tolerant approach to those with expired documentation. By early 2022, UNHCR cleared the backlog of cases due to COVID-19 for those seeking registration and document renewal. UNHCR will align its response with the ‘one refugee’ approach, prioritizing interventions based on identified protection needs and vulnerabilities rather than nationality.

In Algeria, UNHCR carries out key refugee protection activities while dedicating efforts to engage State responsibility, including through capacity-building. UNHCR also continues to work on obtaining data on refugee movements and routes in the country and to reinforce identification and referral mechanisms. Life-sustaining assistance is maintained for vulnerable Sahrawi refugees in the five camps located near Tindouf, including the rehabilitation of water distribution networks and health facilities, for which funding is crucial.

Morocco continues to be a country of transit for mixed movements, as well as a destination for refugees and asylum-seekers. In this context, UNHCR’s support to persons of concern is paramount in terms of registration and documentation, facilitating access to COVID-19 vaccines and services, as well as through cash assistance programming.

Mauritania hosts some 69,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, including some 67,500 Malian refugees in Mbera camp and the surrounding areas. Due to the volatile security situation in Mali, large-scale returns are not expected. Mauritania has witnessed new Malian refugees arriving as part of mixed movements. UNHCR will focus on core protection and response priorities, with the aim of securing durable solutions, support for self-reliance and the socioeconomic inclusion of all persons of concern.

Israel

Israel hosts some 41,500 refugees and asylum-seekers, many of whom already suffer from widespread unemployment, housing insecurity and financial destitution in addition to the negative consequences of COVID-19. To address the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, UNHCR and partners deliver protection services, psychosocial counselling, cash assistance as well as outreach and awareness-raising activities. At the same time, resettlement remained a key protection instrument for the most vulnerable groups.

Yemen

The situation in Yemen is characterized by ongoing hostilities and widespread displacement. However, despite recent escalations within the country and the expanding regional dimension of the conflict, there have been renewed efforts to negotiate an inclusive political settlement. In 2021, some 200,000 were newly-displaced, in addition to the four million IDPs in the country; ongoing escalations in Hudaydah and Marib could lead to further displacement. The markedly deteriorating economy, the ongoing embargo in the north and compounding effects of COVID-19 risks are pushing 80 per cent of the population below the poverty line, as many face further food insecurity and malnutrition.

In 2022, UNHCR will ensure its presence in areas of new and protracted displacement and offer legal assistance, civil status documentation support and targeted protection services for children and survivors of gender-based violence. Cash assistance remains a key protection tool. Despite challenges in maintaining the protection space for refugees and asylum-seekers—particularly in the north, where protection services face regular and repeated suspension—UNHCR provides assistance to 102,110 refugees and asylum-seekers in Yemen, for whom durable solutions including resettlement and voluntary return are increasingly limited.

Mixed and onwards movements

In North Africa, UNHCR operations focused its efforts on identifying individuals in need of international protection in mixed movements. In 2021, some 15,800 newly arrived refugees and asylum-seekers were registered by UNHCR across North Africa, with the largest groups being from Mali, Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Some 32,400 refugees and migrants en route to Europe were disembarked in Libya following rescue at sea. This was more than double the number in 2020, despite Libya not being designated as a place of safety for this purpose.

Tunisian authorities rescued more than 3,700 refugees and migrants who had departed from Libya and UNHCR assessed and assisted those in need. Rescues and interceptions were also conducted by authorities of other States along the North African coast. In 2021, over 2,900 refugees and migrants died at sea between North Africa and Europe. In addition, 161 people arrived in Cyprus by sea from Lebanon, while sea arrivals to Yemen reduced by 26 per cent compared to 2020.

UNHCR enhanced responses to search, rescue and disembarkation in the region, assisting those in need of international protection. UNHCR also strengthened outreach and communication with refugee communities to advise on travel risks and to increase awareness about UNHCR's protection and assistance available to them. UNHCR is progressively enhancing relations with civil society organizations across the region to help in obtaining data on refugee movements and routes.

Elsewhere, mixed movements by air increased from the Middle East to Belarus and onwards destinations in Europe UNHCR strengthened outreach and communication with communities to

advise refugees about the risks associated with these journeys and to encourage refugees to contact UNHCR and partners to see how protection concerns and assistance needs could be addressed in the region.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Creating a favourable protection environment

In 2021, despite the restrictions related to COVID-19, some 128,279 individuals were newly registered across the region, primarily from the Syrian Arab Republic. UNHCR's operations were adapted to process applications, to identify those in need of international protection and to reduce backlogs, while safeguarding data protection.

UNHCR worked closely with regional governments to promote the universal right to a nationality, and collaborated with the International Institute for Humanitarian Law to support virtual training for regional government officials and partners on preventing statelessness. In cooperation with the League of Arab States, UNHCR organized a virtual regional conference to prepare an action plan to facilitate the implementation of the [Arab Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity](#). The conference also presented a [regional toolkit on nationality legislation](#).

Amplifying pre-existing disparities, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on learning for around 2.2 million school-aged refugees, internally displaced and stateless children in the region. Refugee children and youth lacked the resources needed for remote and hybrid learning, and had limited access to cash assistance, language support and psycho-social assistance. To mitigate these disadvantages, UNHCR worked closely with host governments and partners to strengthen national systems, address barriers to access and engagement in learning opportunities, as well as build on interventions to support the safe return to schools and retention in learning through remedial programmes.

Across the five 3RP hosting countries, over 1.1 million persons of concern benefited from community-led initiatives, and some 1.5 million individuals were reached through awareness or information campaigns. To address information needs, research was focused on communication and accountability to affected populations, prioritizing feedback, response, complaints mechanisms and participatory methodologies.

The spread of COVID-19 and enforcement of containment measures amplified mental health issues among persons of concern and their host communities. While mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services are limited in the region, UNHCR trained non-MHPSS specialists, to scale-up the provision of psychological interventions. UNHCR filled knowledge gaps through its active role in research projects, advocacy, and coordination platforms such as the [No Lost Generation MHPSS task force](#).

Ensuring protection from violence and exploitation

Gender-based violence prevention, risk mitigation and response are considered a priority in the region. Between January and September 2021, over 129,000 survivors and people at risk, including boys and men, benefited from multisectoral services through the 3RP response. As part of the roll-out [UNHCR's Policy on the prevention of, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence \(2020\)](#), staff trainings were carried out. An assessment of current implementation with respect to alignment with the policy is ongoing to inform future planning and programming needs. Funding from the [Safe from the Start](#) initiative contributed to operations in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic to support gender-based violence prevention, risk mitigation and response in IDP and refugee contexts.

UNHCR joined the League of Arab States, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality, and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and other stakeholders in a virtual advocacy event during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence to mobilize ongoing efforts and combat violence against women.

New procedures and resources on protecting populations from sexual exploitation were introduced. In cooperation with other United Nations agencies, a webinar on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse was held for regional focal points and multifunctional teams on UNHCR's internal guidance on partner capacity assessment, protection and accountability to persons of concern.

Child protection activities were adapted to COVID-19 measures to facilitate remote case management through digital platforms and hotlines, enhancing communication with communities. In 2021, over 140,000 children in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey benefited from specialized child protection services, while nearly 132,000 children participated in structured child protection and psychosocial support programmes. Furthermore, close to 45,000 women and men benefited from parenting support.

Through enhanced capacity-building and advocacy efforts, UNHCR strengthened sustainability, inclusivity and quality of national, governmental, and civil society child protection services, while ensuring that protection interventions are child-friendly and prioritize the best interests of the child. Collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund and International Office of Migration advanced through the "Blueprint for Joint Action for refugee children". Furthermore, UNHCR contributed to the Fifth Arab Conference on the Rights of the Child as well as the Twenty-fifth session of the Arab Childhood Committee.

Achieving durable solutions

An estimated 700,000 refugees in the region and Turkey needed resettlement in 2021, with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating existing vulnerability and protection concerns. UNHCR advocated for the expansion of resettlement places during the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement and the meetings of the Priority Situations Core Group. By the end of the 2021, UNHCR identified almost 32,500 persons for resettlement, a 45 per cent increase compared to the 22,500 cases identified in 2020.

With over 100 representatives from resettlement States, complementary pathway programmes, academia and UNHCR operations, the Middle East and North Africa Contact Group for Complementary Pathways platform has been instrumental in the search for durable solutions, with a variety of pathways such as employment opportunities and family reunification schemes. The platform is building on established programmes that aim at improving data collection and the evidence base to increase the predictability and availability of different complementary pathways in the future.

Between 2016 and 2021, some 303,500 Syrian refugees returned home from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. With around 35,900 Syrian refugees returning home in 2021, the scale of returns is comparable to movements in 2020 but is lower than before the pandemic. Nevertheless, UNHCR and partners maintained and strengthened preparedness and planning for returns, guided by the Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy and the Global Compact on Refugees. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Office provides returning refugees and other vulnerable populations with humanitarian assistance and other services through a network of community centres. In parallel, dialogue is underway with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and other stakeholders to address obstacles to voluntary return.

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

UNHCR focused its work on expanding and strengthening partnerships with regional stakeholders including government authorities, civil society, financial, faith-based, and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, cultural influencers, academia and persons of concern. This included follow-up on progress made towards pledge implementation and operationalization of the Global Compact on Refugees in the region as well as partner consultations to inform the High-Level Officials Meeting, in December 2021, and the next global non-governmental organization consultations scheduled in 2022.

Partnership with development and financial institutions continued to ensure a strategic direction

to better support both refugees and host communities. National strategic plans were outlined in the context of the UNHCR-World Bank partnership in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon for 2021-2023.

In coordination with the Gulf Cooperation Council, UNHCR's [Islamic Philanthropy programme](#) remains the largest income driver for private sector partnerships in the region, with a diverse portfolio of institutional and individual donors. The philanthropy programme, including the global Ramadan campaign, is now one of the main drivers for growth for private sector partnerships globally, contributing \$36.6 million in 2021, and \$156 million since 2018. UNHCR reached a new demographic of supporters in 2021 by teaming up with Abo Flah, a famous gamer and YouTube influencer in the region, who raised 1 million dollars in 28 hours. In 2021, UNHCR also raised over 1 million dollars from more than 6,000 regular donors through its face-to-face fundraising programme, which was launched in 2020.

Resource mobilization activities across the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council are ongoing. These involve governmental and private donors, as well as initiatives through UNHCR's Zakat Fund, which raised \$20.2 million in 2021 globally to support vulnerable families across the region with cash. This figure includes \$19.27 million raised within the MENA region. In Qatar, UNHCR anticipates its offices will become operational in 2022 as part of the United Nations common premises.

In cooperation with the Civil Society Network for Displacement, a collective platform for civil society actors in the region, UNHCR launched an audio-visual collaborative project on the International Day for Peace. The project united prominent regional art and cultural influencers to advocate for solidarity, resilience and inclusion of refugees who have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

UNHCR supported academic partners at the third regional academic Roundtable on Climate Change and Displacement, in cooperation with Columbia Global Centers in Amman, Jordan. Moreover, UNHCR is collaborating with the Middle East and North Africa Academic Journal and Digital Platform on Displacement and the Arab Institute for Human Rights in Tunisia to pioneer a regional platform which aims to support Arabic scholarly research on displacement issues. The digital regional platform was launched in December 2021 and its first edition is due to be published in February 2022.

C. Financial information

The initial 2022 budget of \$2.432.5 million for the region is less than the 2021 initial budget of \$2,647.8 million, representing an 8 per cent decrease, driven by the significant reductions in Iraq, Libya, and the Syrian Arab Republic.

As of 25 January 2022, some 8 per cent of the region's 2022 financial requirements are funded taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.