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**Overview of UNHCR's operations in the Middle East and  
North Africa****A. Situational context***Syria situation*

The Syria crisis continued to trigger massive levels of displacement over the past year. At the end of 2015, over 6.5 million Syrians were internally displaced and 4.6 million had sought refuge in the host countries of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. In 2015, the number of registered Syrian refugees increased by more than 1.4 million. Despite the generosity of the host countries and donors, the Syrian refugees are facing increasingly difficult living conditions, after more than five years in exile, and many are falling further into poverty. Meanwhile, the host governments continue to face enormous political, economic and security pressure as a result of the conflict. In Jordan and Lebanon, 90 per cent of the refugees live below the poverty line. UNHCR has continued to work closely with partners to address their protection and assistance needs, as well as those of the most vulnerable members of the host communities. In 2016, UNHCR's interventions will continue to be in line with the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), which for the second year in a row brought together more than 200 partners in support of the national response plans of the five main hosting countries.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, the humanitarian situation and level of human suffering endured by the Syrian people dramatically worsened in 2015. Safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access in the country remains a significant challenge. In 2015, a total of 13.5 million people were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance, including 4.5 million in hard-to-reach locations. UNHCR continued to use all possible means to reach the internally displaced and others in need, working across conflict lines and borders, as authorized under United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2139, 2165 and 2191 (2014). Some 3.2 million people were provided with core relief items, including nearly 430,000 persons in more than 30 hard-to-reach locations and 469,000 through cross-border operations. In 2016, UNHCR will continue to support the inter-agency coordination framework by leading the protection, shelter and non-food items, and camp coordination and camp management sectors.

In February 2016, the "Supporting Syria and the region" conference in London paved the way for broader support to Syrian refugees and neighbouring refugee host countries. It built on three previous pledging conferences generously hosted by the Government of Kuwait, as well as on the Berlin conference on the Syrian refugee situation in 2014 and the 2015 UNDP "Resilience Development Forum" in Amman.

*Iraq situation*

In 2015, the escalation of armed conflict in Iraq resulted in significant waves of internal displacement. Nearly 3.3 million people have been displaced across the country since January 2014. This figure does not include nearly 1 million persons displaced by sectarian violence between 2006 and 2008. It is estimated that over 11 million Iraqis may be in need

of humanitarian assistance by the end of 2016. The number of Iraqis seeking asylum in the region also rose considerably, with nearly 222,000 registered. For both those displaced inside Iraq and those who have fled to neighbouring countries, the conditions have worsened and growing impoverishment is forcing people to resort to negative coping strategies or onward movement.

In the context of the inter-agency coordination framework for internal displacement, UNHCR leads the protection, camp coordination and camp management, and shelter and non-food items clusters in Iraq. In 2015, UNHCR and partners transitioned to a digital protection monitoring platform, allowing improved analysis and a more efficient and targeted response. The Office also supported the construction of 34 new camps for the displaced.

#### *North Africa*

In Mauritania, UNHCR assisted more than 50,000 registered refugees in M'bera camp. Given the protracted nature of the Malian refugee situation, the Office is focusing its efforts on reinforcing the self-reliance of refugees through increased investments in education, vocational training and income-generation projects.

UNHCR continued to support the Sahrawi refugees in the five camps near Tindouf. In October 2015, unexpected levels of rainfall led to flooding in the five camps of Laayoune, Boujdour, Awserd, Smara and Dakhla. UNHCR coordinated the inter-agency response, which included joint needs assessments, five airlifts of core relief items and the rehabilitation of damaged houses and other infrastructure.

Unrest in Libya continued to have an impact on persons of concern in the country, including approximately 435,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and an estimated 100,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, of whom over 36,400 were registered with UNHCR. UNHCR provided life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable individuals through its partners and national staff, though access remained a challenge. For refugees and asylum-seekers intercepted or rescued at sea, the Office provided them with humanitarian assistance as well as information regarding access to legal services and the risks associated with movements at sea. Cooperation with the Libyan coast guard and immigration authorities has increased, and UNHCR now has access to 8 of the 18 State-run detention centres. In 2015, UNHCR provided core relief items to nearly 65,000 persons of concern in Libya and continued to provide guidance on available protection and assistance through hotlines and community centres run by partners in Benghazi and Tripoli.

#### *Yemen*

The complex humanitarian situation in Yemen further deteriorated and remains alarming. Since the beginning of the current conflict, over 2.5 million people have been internally displaced. An estimated 82 per cent of the population of Yemen is in need of humanitarian assistance. Although efforts were made to scale up assistance in hard-to-reach areas, including the besieged city enclave in Taizz, the lack of security hampered the delivery of basic items, such as food, medical supplies, shelter, water and fuel. In 2015, UNHCR and partners distributed core relief items to more than 283,000 IDPs in 19 of the 21 governorates in Yemen.

Despite the unstable security situation, Yemen continued to host some 267,000 refugees as of the end of 2015; they are residing in urban areas or in Kharaz camp in the south of the country. UNHCR provided protection and life-saving assistance to the refugees and registered new arrivals; offered legal services; and carried out refugee status determination, detention monitoring and resettlement processing.

Since the escalation of the conflict in Yemen at the end of March 2015, some 170,000 people have fled the country, heading to Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, as well as to other countries in the East and Horn of Africa and further afield. Of those, 43 per cent were estimated to be third country nationals, 40 per cent Yemenis and over 17 per cent

Somali nationals who had been recognized as refugees on a prima facie basis in Yemen. It is hoped that the recently released Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for 2016, co-led by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), will help address the needs of persons fleeing Yemen in the receiving countries. It brings together the respective country plans of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan and outlines the requirements to provide protection and assistance to those fleeing Yemen until the end the year.

#### *Mixed movements, onward movements and protection at sea*

Large-scale mixed movements, including of asylum-seekers and refugees, continued to affect the region. Many persons travelling in mixed movements came from sub-Saharan Africa and the Horn of Africa, as well as from within the Middle East and North Africa region itself, seeking to move onwards to Europe. In response to the situation, UNHCR is employing a regional approach with four strategic objectives: 1) preventing refoulement; 2) improving access to safety and asylum; 3) empowering people of concern to take informed decisions about their lives; and 4) enhancing protection space and access to solutions within broader migration frameworks.

While the majority of Syrian refugees continue to be hosted and protected in the region, 2015 witnessed a notable increase in Syrians seeking refuge further afield in Europe. Syrians comprise the largest proportion of those undertaking the dangerous journey by sea. Their movements follow one of two main routes. The primary one is through the eastern Mediterranean Sea, with Turkey as the most common country of destination and transit. The secondary route runs through North Africa, with departures by sea primarily from Libya or by land through Morocco and on to Spain.

The scale of mixed movements by sea from Libya grew exponentially in 2015. Some 127,500 people departed from Libya to Italy, representing 83 per cent of the total arrivals by sea to Italy. Around 7,500 persons were rescued or intercepted off the coast of Libya, the majority from sub-Saharan Africa. UNHCR provided immediate humanitarian assistance through partner organizations to around 2,000 of those rescued or intercepted at sea in Libya. Through regular detention monitoring, UNHCR identified cases with specific humanitarian needs and ensured their release from detention or the identification of an alternative to detention.

Mixed movements to Yemen continued, despite the ongoing violence, with nearly 92,500 new arrivals recorded in 2015, mostly from Ethiopia. This is one of the highest annual totals of the past decade, with two thirds arriving after the beginning of the conflict. Around 95 individuals are known to have died or gone missing in the Gulf of Aden in 2015. Thus far in 2016, some 36 lives have been lost. IOM and UNHCR developed a set of joint proposals for addressing the situation in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, building on regional initiatives, including the Sana'a Declaration and 2013 the Regional Conference on Asylum and Migration in Yemen.

## **B. Achieving the global strategic priorities**

### *Creating a favourable protection environment*

UNHCR continued to promote the development of legislation and procedures on asylum, migration and anti-trafficking. In Morocco, progress was made on the development of a draft law on asylum, which is pending with the Council of Government before being submitted to Parliament. Moreover, UNHCR supported the training of lawyers and judges in refugee and asylum matters. In Tunisia, the authorities are developing a national strategy for migration and drafting legislation on asylum. In both countries, significant gains have been made in strengthening protection-sensitive migration management capacity. UNHCR is working with the governments of Algeria and Mauritania on the draft law on asylum. In Israel, UNHCR continued to advocate that asylum-seekers be treated in line with

international refugee and human rights standards. In Saudi Arabia, some Yemenis and Syrians were issued with visas, allowing their stay in the country to be regularised, as well as with work permits.

UNHCR continued to conduct individual biometric registration for persons in need of international protection throughout the region. During 2015, UNHCR registered over 148,000 Syrians in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. With regard to refugee status determination under UNHCR's mandate, the Office continued to use it strategically, safeguarding the integrity, quality and efficiency of the process.

Throughout the region, UNHCR worked to enhance community-based protection and to ensure the effective delivery of protection and assistance, particularly in situations where access to persons of concern was limited. Under the community outreach model, community leaders among persons of concern in Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic played an important role in identifying key protection concerns facing their populations, providing counselling and referring individuals at heightened risk. These initiatives further promote refugee protection and support social cohesion. Community centres in Egypt, Lebanon, Mauritania, Libya, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic also played a significant role in promoting social cohesion.

Communication with persons of concern was also enhanced. The refugee help desk system and town hall meetings in Jordan, multifunctional team meetings with community structures in Egypt, telephone hotline systems in Libya and a WhatsApp group in Lebanon allowed refugees to have access to accurate information and to bring concerns to the attention of UNHCR and its partners.

UNHCR's global action plan to end statelessness was advanced in the region. The Office focused its efforts on addressing new risks of statelessness arising from forced displacement, family separation and the loss or destruction of identity documents. UNHCR worked with governments to increase birth registration rates for refugees and IDPs, and to address gaps in nationality laws that lead to risks of statelessness. To this end, joint workshops on statelessness were conducted with the governments and civil society in Bahrain and Qatar.

With respect to the Syria situation, over 196,000 Syrian refugees have been born into exile since the start of the crisis. UNHCR partnered with civil society in the host countries to register new births and launch public information campaigns on birth registration. In Jordan, these measures, coupled with strong government support, led to ten times as many refugee children who were born in the camps obtaining birth certificates in 2015 (more than 3,600), in comparison to 2013 (close 300). In Egypt, these interventions helped in achieving a 93 per cent birth registration rate for Syrian refugees. UNHCR is also responding to the risks of statelessness related to the disruption of maternal health and civil registration services in the Syrian Arab Republic.

#### *Ensuring security from violence and exploitation*

Refugees face increased risks of violence, abuse and exploitation as their displacement becomes more protracted, including due to prolonged family separation, breakdown of community structures, loss of financial and social assets, and overcrowded accommodations. In order to combat this, UNHCR took a number of initiatives aimed at preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and strengthening child protection.

UNHCR worked to strengthen national systems and capacities to address SGBV and child protection issues, including by providing training on case management and referrals as well as by working closely with national partners and governments across the region. In December 2015, UNHCR organized a regional conference, hosted by the Government of Jordan, which aimed to enhance these efforts.

UNHCR worked with partners to integrate SGBV and child protection in their response plans across all sectors. Under the 3RP for Syrian refugees, as of November 2015, over 568,000 boys and girls benefited from community-based child protection and psychosocial interventions, nearly 180,000 survivors of SGBV received specialized support, some 19,300 children benefited from multisectoral services and more than 204,000 individuals benefited from empowerment activities.

#### *Achieving durable solutions*

Nearly 67,000 refugees were submitted for resettlement consideration from the Middle East and North Africa region in 2015. Of this number, 52,000 were Syrian refugees and nearly 15,000 were from other countries, mainly Iraq (10,400). The overall submission figure is 128 per cent of what was originally planned in 2015 (48,000 persons) and was the result of quota increases from certain resettlement countries from September 2015 onwards.

With respect to the Syria refugee situation, the goal of establishing 130,000 places for resettlement and other forms of admission by 2016 was surpassed, with over 162,000 places made available by mid-December 2015. Nevertheless, resettlement needs continue to rise in light of the increasing numbers of refugees and growing vulnerabilities of those in prolonged exile. UNHCR continues to seek resettlement as well as other pathways for admission for at least 10 per cent of the Syrian refugee population (currently 4.7 million).

Based on initial planning figures, UNHCR will submit 56,800 Syrian refugees for resettlement in 2016. To allow for greater efficiency in responding to resettlement requests, UNHCR strengthened its capacity to identify vulnerable refugees and created a rapid deployment staffing scheme. In consultation with resettlement States, UNHCR will also submit cases using streamlined processing methodologies to achieve greater efficiencies.

In addition to upscaling resettlement processing, UNHCR is advocating other pathways for admission, such as humanitarian visas, community-based private sponsorships, labour mobility schemes and family reunification, including for extended family members. In this respect, UNHCR will host a high-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees, to be held in Geneva on 30 March 2016.

In 2015, 10,400 Iraqis were submitted for resettlement consideration from the region and from Turkey to different countries, including Australia, Canada, Ireland, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America. UNHCR continues to advocate increased quotas for these refugees, as well as for Palestinian refugees in Iraq.

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

UNHCR capitalized on existing partnerships with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to advance advocacy on behalf of people of concern.

An emergency management training for the Saudi Red Crescent Authority was organized in December 2015 in the International Humanitarian City in the United Arab Emirates. UNHCR is working with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society on a winterization campaign for Syrian refugees living in Lebanon.

Plans are underway to develop a region-wide network of local and regional civil society actors, including non-governmental organizations, foundations, private sector actors, the media and academia, to strengthen advocacy on displacement issues, build national capacities and share lessons learned on an array of issues, including emergency response and protection.

### **C. Financial information**

The initial 2016 budget approved by the Executive Committee in October 2015 for the Middle East and North Africa region was US\$ 2 billion. These requirements were based on a 2015 prioritization review, and were subsequently revised to US\$ 2.1 billion as of January 2016, taking into account the increase resulting from the new Yemen supplementary budget.

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