The Middle East and North Africa

A Syrian refugee girl returns to school at Za’atari camp in Jordan. © UNHCR/Shawkat Alharfosh

WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND KEY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Strengthening emergency preparedness and response

Emergency assistance will continue to provide a vital lifeline for millions of people of concern, particularly in the context of the health and socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite insecurity and limited humanitarian access, UNHCR will strengthen its emergency response capacity to address humanitarian needs through multisectoral assistance, including protection services, shelter, basic relief items, and multipurpose cash and health assistance. Contingency plans to enable a swift and coordinated response to new and deteriorating situations will be kept up to date. In line with UNHCR’s IDP Policy, the Office will reinforce its role in protection, shelter, and camp coordination and camp management clusters across the region, and will lead the protection and shelter sectors as part of the inter-agency response to the August 2020 blast in Beirut, Lebanon.

Consequences of COVID-19 on planning, preparedness and response

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR worked closely with governments to support the inclusion of people of concern in national services, in particular public health, and maintaining this will be a key priority in 2021. UNHCR has also stepped up its advocacy to include people of concern in other national services and systems, including for social protection and socioeconomic support. While poverty and unemployment rates for refugees were already high prior to the onset of COVID-19, refugees have faced even greater challenges in earning a livelihood, meeting basic needs such as shelter or food, and accessing key services. Socioeconomic vulnerability in turn exacerbates protection risks, particularly in relation to child marriage, child labour, sexual exploitation, and domestic violence, as well as accruing mental health and psychosocial needs.

UNHCR has strengthened community outreach and awareness-raising on public health and hygiene, as well as protection activities that will continue in 2021. UNHCR will particularly focus on increasing needs in terms of prevention of and response to gender-based violence in the context of measures taken to contain COVID-19. Other key priorities are access to education, and mental health and psychosocial support (already identified as a cross-cutting issue pre-pandemic). In addition, support for national health facilities will continue in 2021 in order to increase their capacity to ensure inclusion of people of concern. While UNHCR’s cash assistance programmes will continue to support people to meet their basic needs, UNHCR will also collaborate with existing government programmes (social safety nets), including through advocacy, capacity-building and partnerships with development and financial actors such as the World Bank.
The challenges facing people of concern in the Middle East and North Africa region have been exacerbated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. With the pandemic disrupting daily life across the region, UNHCR and partners will continue to deliver protection and assistance to the most vulnerable, adapting in the context of prolonged conflict. Almost 20% of those displaced globally come from the region.

### Syrian Arab Republic

With more than 6 million IDPs and 5.6 million registered Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries as of 2020, of whom 40% are children and 21% are women, the Syria situation will remain the largest displacement crisis in the world. An acute economic crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, will also continue to impact the humanitarian situation. While humanitarian needs and significant protection risks will likely persist inside the Syrian Arab Republic in 2021, IDPs and refugees are expected to continue to return, particularly to areas where relative stability has emerged, subject to restrictions on borders, movement and travel due to COVID-19.

UNHCR will focus on multisectoral assistance, including to support access to safety and civil documentation, and to strengthen community-based protection. It will promote comprehensive solutions, provide emergency core relief items and shelter assistance, and support livelihood opportunities. UNHCR will maintain large-scale cash assistance for the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, including increased support to those most affected by the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the five main countries hosting Syrian refugees, UNHCR will continue to co-lead the 3RP along with UNDP, coordinating the work of more than 270 partners, in support of the vital role played by host communities.

**Monitored by UNHCR from Jan-Aug 2020: does not reflect all returns.**

### Iraq

Inside Iraq, some 1.3 million Iraqis remain internally displaced and more than 47 million IDP returns are faced by protection risks, constrained access to basic services and insecurity, while contending with limited access to livelihood opportunities and shelter, as well as the dangers from explosive remnants of war. IDPs are likely to continue to face secondary or multiple displacement where return to areas of origin is not possible or sustainable. In neighbouring countries, as of September 2020 there were some 2,790,000 Iraqi refugees and asylum-seekers—of whom 39% are children and 29% are women—who are expected to remain registered with UNHCR. There are also an additional 31,000 people living in camps without registration in Al-Hassakeh Governorate in the Syrian Arab Republic.

UNHCR’s focus will remain on protection and gradual transition from humanitarian assistance to development programming, including by strengthening access to national services and formal employment opportunities, and developing national policies and plans, and identifying comprehensive protection and solutions strategies for people of concern. Additional aid, such as increased cash assistance and support for livelihoods, will be provided to mitigate the medium- and long-term socioeconomic impact of COVID-19.

### Yemen

Needs in Yemen will remain acute in 2021, with the humanitarian crisis still considered to be the worst globally. As of mid-2020, over 24 million people depended on assistance due to persistent fighting, socioeconomic insecurity and heavy rains and flooding. Some 3.7 million people have been recorded as internally displaced since the start of the conflict in 2015. With the peace process unlikely to be fully implemented by the end of 2020, an increase in the number of conflict frontlines and thus displacement is expected in 2021. The protection space for refugees and asylum-seekers in Yemen deteriorated in the context of COVID-19, with reduced access to UNHCR and partners, increasingly restrictive policies towards foreigners and limited socioeconomic prospects, leading UNHCR to expand its outreach and assistance, including through cash.

In 2021, UNHCR will focus on delivering humanitarian aid to IDPs, IDP returns and affected local communities, while continuing to improve protection space for refugees and asylum-seekers through community-based protection strategies and work with local authorities and partners. UNHCR will also continue protection, shelter/non-food items and camp coordination and camp management clusters. It will also co-lead the refugee and migrant multi-sector response and work together with IOM to respond to mixed movements to and through Yemen.

### Libya

Despite ongoing peace talks, fighting is likely to trigger further internal displacement in 2021. Although the total number of migrants and refugees in detention declined in early 2020—from some 5,000 in January to fewer than 1,800 in February—the final quarter of 2020, the number of people rescued or intercepted at sea had surpassed that of 2019, with a subsequent rise in the numbers detained to around 2,500. In 2021, the Libyan Coast Guard is expected to continue disembarking refugees and migrants attempting to depart via the Mediterranean Sea, with many likely to find themselves in prolonged detention, in dire conditions.

UNHCR will continue to protect the displaced in Libya, including IDPs and returnees, and will assist refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly in urban areas. UNHCR will deliver life-saving assistance at disembarkation points and detention facilities, while advocating alternatives to detention. Although mobility restrictions related to COVID-19 limited the implementation of durable solutions in 2020, in 2021, UNHCR will prioritize direct resettlement, voluntary repatriation and family reunification, as well as humanitarian evacuations for vulnerable people of concern to the Emergency Transit Centres in Italy and Romania, and to the Emergency Transit Mechanisms in Niger and Rwanda.
In the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR will continue life-saving assistance and shelter support, including through cross-border activities from Turkey. Interventions in the Iraq and Syria situations will go beyond emergency response, transitioning to supporting solutions and longer-term development plans, especially in Iraq. UNHCR will continue to provide cash and core relief items in Yemen to meet protection, shelter and other basic needs. In Libya and neighbouring North African countries, UNHCR and partners will undertake protection monitoring and provide humanitarian and medical assistance at accessible disembarkation points. UNHCR is preparing to respond to a potential influx in Mauntena from Mali as part of the Sahel situation.

Preserving protection space and supporting access to national asylum systems and services

In line with the preferences expressed by communities of concern in the Middle East and North Africa through participatory assessments, UNHCR and partners will continue to provide community outreach both in-person (including through community outreach volunteers and community centres), as well as through innovative virtual and digitalized tools tailored to the capacities and needs of all people of concern, taking into account age, gender and diversity factors. The capacity of UNHCR to engage and communicate with communities and develop multisectoral protection and solutions services remotely will be strengthened, including through investments in equipment, innovative software and applications, human resources and partnerships (including with the private sector and financial institutions).

UNHCR will continue to support issuance of civil documentation, including birth certificates, to displaced populations, facilitating access to protection, services and solutions and preventing statelessness. Based on quality and reliable country of origin information, UNHCR will advise States on asylum systems and adjudication of claims for international protection across the region. With governments making welcome commitments in terms of access to education, further support is needed to build the capacity of overstretched and under-resourced education systems across the region.

Ensuring protection from violence and exploitation, and providing mental health support

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing protection risks and vulnerabilities, especially in terms of health and livelihoods. Nearly half of displaced children in the region are out of school, child marriage rates are increasing and, in certain countries, approximately half of refugee households reportedly rely on the income generated by a child to meet basic needs. Noting the linkages between socioeconomic vulnerability and child protection risks, UNHCR will continue to reinforce cash assistance, complemented by appropriate protection services. UNHCR’s strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence underscores the need to strengthen national systems and capacity, as well as the importance of community-based protection and response initiatives. UNHCR will also focus on mainstreaming gender-based violence risk mitigation across all sectors, promoting gender equality in national laws; protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; and improved data collection and analysis in this area.

Achieving comprehensive solutions

While COVID-19 severely restricted resettlement submissions in 2020, remote processing and other innovations helped mitigate the overall impact, while also preserving the integrity of the process and the safety of refugees, staff members and receiving communities. To the extent possible, UNHCR will aim to meet outstanding quotas while facilitating the gradual resumption of resettlement departures. Through the annual tripartite consultations on resettlement and the Priority Situations Core Group, and drawing on the “Comprehensive protection and solutions strategy for Syrian refugees” (2018), UNHCR will continue to engage closely with resettlement countries and partners to safeguard ongoing resettlement commitments in the region. Efforts to expand access to resettlement and complementary pathways will also remain critical, both in order to give individual families a future and to demonstrate to host countries that the international community is ready to share the responsibility of hosting refugees.

While a majority of refugees in the region wish to return home, only a small proportion plan to do so in the near future. As most refugees are likely to remain in their countries of asylum in the medium term, sustained support to host States and ongoing assistance programmes remain crucial.

Mobilizing support through strategic partnerships

Addressing regional refugee crises through an inclusive approach remains a priority in terms of UNHCR’s strategic partnerships across the region. This approach is reflected in the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan for the Syria Crisis (3RP)—an integrated humanitarian and development plan to address the needs of refugees and host communities alike led by UNHCR and UNDP and developed together with 270 partners. Across the region, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to require strong partnerships with governments, particularly national health authorities. Mixed population movements across the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Aden will also necessitate collaborative cross-regional approaches to prevent loss of life and strengthen solidarity and responsibility-sharing.

UNHCR will particularly strengthen its partnership with financial institutions, including the World Bank Group, to identify sustainable solutions to displacement across the region. In Mauritania, UNHCR will engage with the World Bank and the Government to advocate the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in the national health system, and will build upon the recent partnership with the African Development Bank and the GS Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) that supported a coordinated response to COVID-19. Assisting IDPs in Iraq, UNHCR will also work with the World Bank to facilitate their inclusion in national social protection mechanisms.

In line with the Global Compact on Refugees, efforts will continue to ensure that a whole-of-society approach is adopted in responding to regional crises, and that multi-stakeholder partnerships are integrated from the initial design phase of projects and programmes. Working with local civil society actors has been essential to addressing issues such as non-discrimination and social cohesion, as well as to shaping the narrative on the contributions of refugees. UNHCR will continue to support implementation of pledges made by States and NGOs at the Global Refugee Forum, including increased support to host communities and fostering greater opportunities for education, economic empowerment and financial inclusion of people of concern.
UNHCR will continue to strengthen its collaboration with UNICEF and WFP on common delivery mechanisms for cash assistance, such as the Common Cash Facility approach developed for Jordan and Lebanon. UNHCR will also support the expansion of common targeting approaches, through the UNHCR-WFP Joint Targeting Hub and other similar initiatives.

Said Foundation supports Syrian refugees through scholarships
Since 2014, the Said Foundation and UNHCR have been working together to improve refugees’ access to accredited quality tertiary education through the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarship programme. Over 400 Syrian refugee students in Jordan and Lebanon have been able to build a brighter future for themselves and their family.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION
BUDGETS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA | USD

OPERATION

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<th>ALL Pillars</th>
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MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa
17,115,454 19,000,000 - - 19,000,000
Regional activities for the Middle East and North Africa*
48,340,707 46,421,052 - - 48,421,052
SUBTOTAL 65,456,161 67,421,052 - - 67,421,052

MIDDLE EAST

Other operations in the Middle East
45,665,553 - - 18,000,000 18,000,000
Iraq 539,543,818 177,163,304 325,000 - 332,938,857 410,456,000
Israel 6,000,000 6,000,000 - - 6,000,000
Jordan 426,737,449 370,557,449 - - 370,557,449
Lebanon 607,516,457 487,594,837 834,318 - 488,429,155
Saudi Arabia Multi-Country Office*
11,482,831 17,281 139,664 - 139,664
Syrian Arab Republic 586,273,712 46,968,149 198,640 317,833,049 247,382,805 612,382,693
Yemen 252,052,873 76,650,482 - - 194,394,517 270,999,999
SUBTOTAL 2,074,380,196 1,176,261,410 4,207,622 317,833,049 752,669,067 2,280,257,148

NORTH AFRICA

Algeria 37,438,503 37,118,500 - - 37,118,500
Egypt 118,312,434 17,518,805 - - 177,518,805
Libya 84,089,958 63,328,051 - - 26,740,333 90,568,384
Mauritania 24,581,889 27,131,658 - - 27,131,658
Morocco 8,500,000 8,000,000 - - 8,000,000
Tunisia 11,589,319 7,778,402 - - 7,778,402
Western Sahara - Confidence-building measures 4,000,000 4,000,000 - - 4,000,000
SUBTOTAL 288,529,182 265,375,416 - - 26,740,333 292,115,749
TOTAL 2,028,365,419 1,509,057,878 1,493,622 317,833,049 819,409,400 2,047,793,949

Implications of underfunding
In 2021, critical and life-saving activities across the region, along with support to address increased needs and vulnerabilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, could be impacted by underfunding. Affected activities could include winter assistance, cash assistance, support for basic needs, health services and core protection activities.

Sufficient funding for cash assistance programmes will remain critical in 2021 to mitigate growing protection risks such as child labour, gender-based violence, early marriage and other forms of exploitation, as well as the longer-term socioeconomic impact of COVID-19. Underfunding in 2021 would also affect UNHCR’s winterization programme, leaving vulnerable refugees and IDPs unable to meet basic needs during winter months.

With health costs continuing to rise and not all refugees having access to public health care, continued funding is vital to ensure that refugee families have access to basic medical services, including primary health care, as well as secondary and tertiary care. Further investment to meet the education needs of children, youth and adolescents, aligned with national policies and plans (including in the context of responses to COVID-19) will be needed to minimize child protection risks and build better futures for refugee and host community children alike.

For operations in the region facing chronic funding shortfalls, such as Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, it will be vital to maintain minimum standards of assistance, including in protection, shelter, health, and water and sanitation, providing support to host countries and helping to address the causes of onward movements. In line with “one-refugee” approaches, adequate funding will be sought to assist refugees of all nationalities equally. In Lebanon, economic recovery following the blast in Beirut remains a crucial challenge, and funding shortfalls will have implications for longer-term programmes to address development gaps and maintain protection space.

2020 EARMARKING AND TIMELINESS OF FUNDING FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA | As of 1 October 2020

2020 budget: $2.828 billion
Indicative funds available*: $1.307 billion | 46% funded

20% 68% 8%
8% 4% 64%