

NGO Statement on The Middle East and North Africa

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a variety of NGOs.

In **Yemen**, civilians are once again caught in the crossfire of hostilities with rapidly shifting frontlines and increased airstrikes. Moreover, the worsening economic situation leads to increasing negative coping mechanisms. Meanwhile the mandate of the only independent mechanism to document and investigate IHL violations -the Group of Eminent Experts- has not been renewed. Furthermore, the fate of East African migrants is too often ignored despite them facing numerous threats to life, kidnap, and arbitrary detention.

NGOs urge stakeholders to:

- Prioritise an inclusive peace process in Yemen, while establish a new international independent accountability mechanism to document violations in Yemen.
- Ensure funding to meet life-saving needs, address root causes of vulnerability and build communities' resilience.
- Advocate for freedom of movement, access to services, and the ability to exercise rights for migrant communities. UN agencies and NGOs must be enabled to support these communities.

The situation in **Syria** has also worsened. Active conflict remains a threat to civilians and to delivery of aid; while the economic crisis worsened living conditions and access to services. Millions of IDP families have spent another winter in inadequate shelters. Climate change, drought, and a lack of effective transboundary water governance has harmed food production and could cause more displacement. In line with good donorship principles, we urge early recovery assistance to ensure equitable access to public services across Syria.

NGOs welcome efforts to increase cross-line assistance, while noting remaining difficulties in delivering assistance at scale. While NGOs operating from Damascus have seen access improve, many sectors and the protection space remain constrained.

NGOs urge stakeholders to:

- Agree and fund approaches to delivering principled early recovery programmes across Syria.
- Increase protection space, including access to legal assistance, housing, land, and property rights.
- Ensure renewal UNSC Resolution 2585, guaranteeing aid modalities to meet humanitarian needs at scale across Syria, through a cross-border aid delivery mechanism for hard-to-reach areas.

While intentions surveys show that return is not a preferred option, **Syrian refugees** who choose to go back face many protection risks such as arbitrary arrest and detention. Indeed, the country remains unsafe for organised return and UNHCR must be able to monitor the protection space before any policy change. The protection space in hosting countries must also improve, supporting refugee self-reliance and pathways to durable solutions.

In **Lebanon** multiple crises have resulted in increased tensions between and amongst communities. The many aid coordination mechanisms also resulted in inconsistent approaches, while essential public services delivery further deteriorated. Most Syrian refugees still face difficulties in accessing protection and face increased risks. Very few hold legal stay documentation, which restricts safe movement, access to health and education services, and increases risks of statelessness.

NGOs urge stakeholders to:

- Develop a Whole of Lebanon approach effectively linking humanitarian and development programmes to help prioritize humanitarian action and understand where response architectures and accountability can be optimized.
- Engage the Lebanon Government for an equitable approach to social protection schemes and establish a Cash Working Group.
- Advocate for resuming UNHCR refugee registration. Access to civil documentation should also include programmes to reduce risks of statelessness.

In **Turkey**, the largest refugee hosting country, refugees are pushed into extreme poverty by the economic crisis and face increasing social tensions. In a protracted context also affected by new arrivals, funding should target short-term humanitarian needs, protection and social cohesion. Moreover, national authorities and NGOs should be supported to strengthen the legal framework, uphold refugee rights, and ensure access to economic and higher education opportunities, while supporting resettlement.

In **Iraq**, while large-scale military interventions ended, thousands remain displaced, often multiple times. The 2020 IDP camps closures forced thousands into informal and inadequate settlements. They now face challenges in achieving a durable solution, including security concerns, discrimination, re-integration obstacles, damaged property, and lack of livelihoods. The country also hosts 250,000 Syrian refugees in dire need of durable solutions.

NGOs urge stakeholders to:

- Work with the Iraq Government to support pathways to durable solutions based on IDPs' intentions. This involves inclusive peacebuilding and transitional justice, with representation of women and minorities.
- Ensure that labelling people as "returnees" acknowledges obstacles in overcoming displacement-related needs. Significant humanitarian, development and stabilization interventions remain necessary to achieve durable solutions.

The situation in **Libya** continues to deteriorate involving flagrant denial of rights and the detention of migrants. With departure record levels in 2021, many migrants were intercepted by the Libya Coast Guard and returned to a country the UN declared unsafe. In 2020-21, because of COVID-19 but also due to Libyan authorities' obstructions, very few departures happened through formal channels such as resettlement or evacuation flights. Access to documentation remains a major challenge for many Libyans and migrants, further limiting access to livelihoods opportunities and services.

As such:

- Donors should provide multi-year flexible funding. This will support NGOs complex negotiations for safe and unhindered access to deliver timely assistance at scale throughout Libya.
- UNHCR should establish an RSD process and recognise asylum applications beyond the pre-defined nine countries.

- Arbitrary detention of migrants and refugees should end, with an immediate, unconditional, and coordinated release of the most vulnerable, including women, children, trafficking victims, elderly people, and those with medical conditions.
- Libya's migration/refugee policy and legal framework should be urgently reformed, centered on human rights, guaranteeing non-*refoulement* and access to asylum, with due process.

Across the **MENA region**, the pandemic and limited public health responses have entrenched inequalities. We need increased availability of vaccines and campaigns to respond to low take-up rates.

Finally, we call on stakeholders to advocate with all duty-bearers across the region to increase civic space and ensure protection to activists, including women's rights activists. We, ourselves, must also ensure that humanitarian response is heavily informed, if not led, by local voices.

Further details are available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you