

NGO Statement on the Middle East and North Africa

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs.

Humanitarian needs in the MENA region are acute, while the international community's political will and financial resources from donor countries are in worrying decline. New and emerging crises are directly affecting funding amid critical protection challenges and out-of-reach of humanitarian aid. Durable solutions are not available for many.

In **Yemen**, ongoing humanitarian access constraints continue to impede aid deliveries and threaten aid workers' security. 4.5 million Yemenis live in protracted displacement with many IDPs unable to return.

NGOs urge stakeholders to:

- Ensure unfettered humanitarian access to provide critical lifesaving aid and principled protection programming, including to survivors of GBV and human rights violations.
- Ensure the UN-led Durable Solutions architecture integrates NGO, civil society, and displaced Yemenis' perspectives.

Inside **Syria** and beyond its borders, 13 million people remain in protracted displacement. Last month's earthquake amplified humanitarian needs and will have generational impacts. The cross-border mechanism remains one of the few remaining options for providing lifesaving aid. More access is needed to move aid and recovery assistance into Syria.

States must:

- Extend the Syria cross-border mechanism for a minimum of 12 months and expand authorizations for all available border crossings into affected areas.
- Provide NGOs access to adequate funding, especially given their scaled-up responses.
- Focus on internal displacement and UNHCR ensuring detailed analyses to all response actors.
- Expand the protection space, particularly for women and children, protected minorities, returnees, and stateless persons.

Across the region, 5.4 million **Syrian refugees** remain in protracted displacement. In 2022, 93% do not plan on returning this year due to Syria's volatility. Interviews with returnees highlighted a wide range of protection challenges. Conditions in Syria are not suitable for a safe, voluntary, and dignified return.

UNHCR should:

- Expand monitoring and information sharing for return movement and prevent any form of coerced or forced return while prioritizing additional pathways for durable solutions.
- Improve refugee resilience by expanding access to aid, legal status and assistance, healthcare, education, and employment in host-countries.
- All stakeholders to expand refugees' access to information on the security conditions and protection challenges in Syria to support informed decisions.

Lebanon is hosting the largest number of refugees per capita while dealing with the worst economic, political, and financial crisis in its recent history. Tensions between host and refugee communities are high and vulnerabilities in both communities are increasing, including levels of food insecurity.

NGOs urge:

- UNHCR and all stakeholders to engage with the government against current anti-refugee rhetoric.
- Donors to prioritize social cohesion initiatives targeting both refugee and host communities in their humanitarian and development responses.
- The government to provide services to host communities and refugees without distinction, including for children.

In Iraq, IDPs living in camps and informal sites face barriers to return and most indicate they do not intend to return in the next year. The potential renewed push by the government to close the remaining camps, particularly in the Kurdistan Region, concerns NGOs. Concerted efforts are needed to explore both resettlement and local integration.

NGOs call on:

- UNHCR and States to ensure that, with the de-activation of the National Protection Cluster, gaps in the protection landscape are closely monitored and clear channels for advocacy, response, coordination, and concerted engagement with the government are ensured.
- The government to establish a more predictable and reliable civil documentation system, security clearance process, and nationality law reforms.

In Libya, people on the move face a cycle of violence and persistent precarity. While transitioning to a Humanitarian, Development, and Peacebuilding context, the protection situation is not improving for migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers who face a high risk of physical violence, exploitation, forced labour, arbitrary and indefinite detention, and trafficking and robberies. Increased scrutiny and reduction in operational space results in denial of humanitarian access.

NGOs urge:

- The authorities to allow UNHCR to fully exercise its mandate, including for refugee and asylum status, and ensure unhindered access to populations.
- Donors to follow a principled approach in maintaining humanitarian services based on needs and to advocate to support humanitarian access.
- The EU and donors to follow a principled approach in maintaining humanitarian services based on Libya's needs and to advocate to support humanitarian access.

The **North African** region is reaching a new level of geopolitical tension, socioeconomic instability, and insecurity. People are fleeing to Europe through the few legal options remaining. Where no legal options are left, they are risking dangerous boat journeys across the Mediterranean. Increased opportunities in home countries and complementary pathways elsewhere are needed.

NGOs call on:

- UNHCR to focus on legal and complementary pathways, rather than border management, alongside enhanced temporary protection mechanisms allowing for free temporary movement and access to basic services in Europe.
- The EU and States to establish search and rescue capacity in the Mediterranean, through strengthening coordination with maritime rescue actors – including NGOs.
- States to increase resettlement pledges, safe and regular pathways, including through the Emergency Transit Mechanisms.

Across the **region**, gender discrimination in nationality laws threatens to create a new generation of stateless children. Governments must uphold citizens' equal right to confer nationality, regardless of gender, thereby fostering inclusion and eliminating a root cause of statelessness.

- NGOs urge States to address gender discrimination in their nationality laws at the June 2023 High-Level Summit on Achieving Gender Equality in Nationality Laws.

Finally, displacement also occurs due to **changing climates** with drought, desertification, environmental degradation, and destruction of agriculture and water resources.

- UN agencies and donors must invest more to better understand, anticipate, and mitigate the effects of climate and disasters-induced displacement and build more resilient communities.

A longer version is available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you.