

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
STANDING COMMITTEE
89th MEETING
13-15 March 2024

NGO Statement on the Middle East and North Africa

Dear Chair

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

Gaza has impacted the entire region. Over 31,000 are dead, including over 13,000 children. More than 2 million people have been displaced. The potential impact of funding cuts to UNRWA on responses in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria will have implications across the region.

- **NGOs reiterate calls for an immediate ceasefire**

In Lebanon, violence at the southern border has led to displacement, including of Syrian refugees. This comes at a time where the economic crisis has already increased social tensions and with a reported rise in deportations, many refugees are already limiting their movements.

NGOs therefore:

- Ask UNHCR and diplomatic missions to engage the Government of Lebanon to ensure access to aid and services, to lift restrictive measures and address anti-refugee discourse.
- Urge donor governments to invest in social cohesion programmes and ensure that Syrian refugees participate in development programming.

In Jordan, NGOs welcome the role that the Hashemite Kingdom has played in providing opportunities for refugees to access services and livelihoods. However, potential changes to social security subsidies and access to work permits may result in reduced access to the labour market.

We call for:

- UNHCR to work with the government and development donors to ensure that refugees can continue to access employment.
- Engagement with the private sector to create job opportunities for refugees and host communities.
- Donors to maintain financing that targets refugees, and to ensure refugee priorities remain centred in the development agenda.
- The integration of refugees into Jordanian society, emphasising diversity.

In Türkiye, following the earthquakes, Syrian refugees have faced restrictions to access aid, services, and compensation schemes. There are reports of deportations and reduced protection space. There is also a rise in anti-refugee political rhetoric, including threats of forced returns.

NGOs ask:

- UNHCR and diplomatic missions to continue advocating for refugees to receive access to services and assistance and for increased provision of MHPSS.
- Donor governments to engage the government of Türkiye to uphold the principle of *non-refoulement* and to provide information on the security situation in Syria before refugees return.

Inside Syria, the continuing economic collapse of the country has led to IDPs choosing to return to areas of origin and, in the northeast, displacement camps as they can no longer afford rents to live in displacement.

NGOs urge stakeholders to:

- Ensure that those in areas outside of government control are able to receive aid assistance, through pressuring authorities not to impede the delivery of aid both via cross-border and cross-line programming.
- Deliver early recovery programmes that restore community access to essential services, and maintain a solutions lens.
- Ensure the centrality of protection in all programming, understanding that protection needs be addressed as part of resilience building.
- Deliver on the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement's UN-collective commitment to ensure an effective protection and assistance response to IDPs.

In Iraq, the transition out of the humanitarian architecture has resulted in new ways of responding to humanitarian and protection needs, particularly IDPs. The work of the UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement to engage the government on a roadmap is welcomed, yet has provided limited opportunities for the expertise of NGOs to inform the document.

NGOs urge:

- Stakeholders to ensure the protection platform in Iraq is adequately resourced and able to provide development actors with critical information on protection concerns.
- UN leadership and diplomatic stakeholders engage the government of Iraq to ensure camp closures are managed effectively, do not result in marginalisation, and include an extended deadline for closure.

In Yemen, the escalating conflict threatens to destabilise the peace process. It is critical that there is tracking of the experience of return of IDPs to inform solutions.

NGOs urge stakeholders to:

- Ensure conflict de-escalation, and involvement of all stakeholders in an inclusive peace process.
- Consult with aid agencies around impacts of terror designations on the humanitarian situation.
- Develop a Yemen-wide framework for tracking returns, including around the reliability of information for IDPs .

- Continue to advocate for increased access for aid actors to displaced communities across Yemen.

In Libya, the situation forcing people to move remains dire. The European response to onward irregular migration risks trapping many in the hands of traffickers.

- NGOs urge Libyan authorities to allow UNHCR to fully exercise its mandate and ensure all protection agencies have unhindered access to populations.

Concerning statelessness – access to services and livelihoods should be facilitated for stateless persons and gender discrimination in nationality laws should be addressed.

Finally, it is critical that opportunities for third-country solutions increase.

Further details are available on icvanetwork.org.

Thank you.