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IN TOUCH WITH REFUGEES

The Communication with Communities and Outreach in the Middle East and North Africa Region

by UNHCR MENA Protection Service
and Transcultural Campaigning

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INTERNAL

IN TOUCH WITH REFUGEES

The Communication with Communities and Outreach in the Middle East and North Africa Region

INTRODUCTION

In UNHCR's operations, Communicating with Communities (CwC) and community outreach are key methods for ensuring the participation of refugees, IDPs, and returnees and stateless people in designing the humanitarian response. However, with sharply increasing numbers of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other PoC, and the growing complexity of the communication landscape, CwC must adapt to fast-changing circumstances.

Against this background, the UNHCR Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Bureaucommissioned a regional study covering CwC engagement to take stock at both ends of the CwC spectrum, from UNHCR and partners to the end users, and formulate targets for the way forward both at UNHCR and inter-agency levels.

The study presents the regional CwC context and the main findings of the research, covering four UNHCR country operations, namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, while the third part looks at Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen in MENA, as well as Turkey as part of the Europe Bureau. it outlines the communication needs of PoCs and the findings of a pilot study of refugees in Egypt, respectively.

It is based on inputs from UNHCR, UN agencies, NGOs, and refugees in the Middle East and North Africa. Under normal circumstances the research would have required several field missions, but as it coincided with COVID-19 restrictions, the team had to rely on virtual encounters and phone interviews, which are more cumbersome both for the interviewers and their counterparts.

The research and drafting of the report were entrusted to Transcultural Campaigning (TC), whose researchers mapped CwC tools and practices in the region used by UNHCR and partners and evaluated their accessibility and availability.

This regional study was possible with thanks to UNHCR teams in the 10 country operations, refugees and asylum seekers, Caritas, CESVI, DRC, IOM, IRC, NRC, PSTIC, TdH, UNICEF, UNODC, and WFP. Special thanks goes to Ragnhild Ek and Mans Nyberg, Melita Sunjic (TC) Ana Belén Anguita Arjona, Annalaura Sacco, Hy Shelow (UNHCR MENA Protection Service) and Katie Holland, Nourhane Hussein, Nerine Massoud, Mukhtar Mahmud Osman, Muhammed Refaat, Ilaria Tranfo, and Won Jang (research team), as well as the multilingual refugee team who assisted with the social media research and the survey in Egypt.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 21st century has brought CwC to completely new levels, especially in the MENA region. Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, there has been a massive increase of forced displacement caused by violence and conflict both at regional and global levels. There are currently some 16 million people forcibly displaced in MENA and over 80 million across the world.[1] At the same time, people were fleeing through countries in the region in mixed population movements.

This has brought a growing need for information and communication with the forcibly displaced communities to ensure adequate protection and assistance, enabling them to make their voice heard and participate in decisions that affect their own lives.

CwC reflects the commitments of the humanitarian community to Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and to the Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) policy[2], so that no one is left behind. Affected useful communities have different information needs, come from diverse cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds, with some living in urban areas, some in camps, and some being on the move.

Communication technology is undergoing a digital revolution. New tools and channels are constantly emerging, with humanitarian actors keeping up with technological development while at the same time assessing which of the new tools are accessible and

1 UNHCR Global Appeal 2020 - 2021, MENA Chapter

2 Putting People First: UNHCR Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability Report 2018-2019, and UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity, 8 March 2018, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bb628ea4.html

Gawilan Syrian refugee camp in Iraq.
© UNHCR/Rasheed Hussein Rasheed

useful for all community members, women and girls, men and boys, people with disabilities, older people, people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, and other individuals with diverse profiles.

For all these reasons, UNHCR MENA Protection Service commissioned a study covering CwC engagement in 10 countries, with the aim to:

- Take stock at both ends of the CwC spectrum - the information providers and the end users, and
- Formulate targets for the way forward at UNHCR and inter-agency level.

The study *In touch with refugees* is divided into five parts. The first part presents the main findings and recommendations of the study, outlines opportunities on CwC. Chapter 1 assesses the operational contexts and main communication tools and channels in four MENA countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. Chapter 2 looks at six more countries: Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and Turkey. All these UNHCR country operations are under the UNHCR MENA Bureau, except Turkey, which is under the Europe Bureau and has been included in the study after consultations with the operation. Chapter 3 sets out the information needs of different groups of PoC, including vulnerable persons, while Chapter 4 presents the findings of the pilot study conducted in Egypt.

These 10 countries present a wide range of different displacement situations. In the countries affected by the Syria crisis, the presence of large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers dates from 2011, when the conflict broke out. In contrast, Algeria and Yemen have protracted refugee situations going back to the 1970s and 1980s. The conflicts in Iraq, Libya, and Yemen have produced large IDP populations, with host communities also affected. The countries along the migration routes from East and Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia towards the Mediterranean are also affected by mixed population movements which include persons of concern to UNHCR (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen).

MAIN FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study aims to inform a CwC action plan providing efficient and effective services for forcibly displaced communities and a regional solution for inter-agency collaboration, facilitating knowledge-sharing and streamlining of communication activities. Hence, this study assesses the feasibility of a regional CwC network, which would include referrals and the possibility to link the network to existing UNHCR and inter-agency tools, including call centres, hotlines, and helplines that provide services to affected communities.

A NEW INTEGRATED CWC APPROACH

The role of CwC in UNHCR MENA's operations has over recent years developed considerably, also among partners, and in increased inter-agency collaboration.

This has resulted in diverse CwC and outreach activities. Humanitarian actors have process in place for creating and disseminating messages and materials through various communication channels and deploying multiple feedback mechanisms to ensure that communities participate in decisions that directly impact on the lives of forcibly displaced persons and other PoC.

Communication and transparency are key elements of AAP.[3] CwC is developing into one of the main instruments in meeting AAP requirements. Over the years, know-how has grown, and time and resources are increasingly being invested in further developing CwC, its tools and channels.

Innovative ways are being devised to adapt face-to-face, traditional, and digital communication tools for CwC and community outreach to respond to the increasing demand for information coming out of expanded and improved feedback mechanisms. Yet, the digital divide among communities is a concern.

As more information is reaching community end users and it often comes from different sources and through various channels, this could lead to confusion. Messages need to be clear and consistent and address users' needs.

A key recommendation of this study is the need for a new, integrated CwC approach to allow for a unified process built upon collaboration at each stage. This could be coupled with an audio-visual platform carrying video, podcast, regular news relevant to the end users, and disseminated in different languages.

A new communication-management system is taking into account the information needs and communication habits of end users in the communities, ensure collaboration in messaging and production of materials, in addition to the current coordinating meetings, and streamline the information output in close collaboration with all actors, ultimately ensuring that efficient two-way communication is in place.

CWC IN THE REGION

CwC is undertaken by UNHCR and partners in all 10 country operations under review, which are characterized by different but structural, technical , and operational realities.

Available communication tools and channels, ranging from face-to-face and traditional to digital tools are being used to varying degrees and are being further developed. A change process is underway, new call centres have been established and social media is in the process of being expanded overall.

Many organisations in the region are engaged in CwC and the importance of coordination of activities is increasingly being recognised. While all UNHCR country operations are collaborating with partners on projects, usually on project-to-project basis, in four of them, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, and Yemen, humanitarian agencies have attempted to establish formal inter-agency mechanisms.

[3] UNHCR Operational Guidance

Sahrawi refugee family, Algeria.
© UNHCR/Markel Redondo

The COVID-19 crisis has intensified the focus on CwC and outreach in all countries, bringing enhanced use of both traditional and digital tools and emphasising the need for a more coordinated interagency approach. Against this background, WHO, UNICEF, and IFRC launched a Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) working group in MENA, in order to guide the communication activities related to the COVID-19 response across the region. This joint initiative is open to all stakeholders and technical experts.

CwC with PoCs in mixed population movements is still a developing domain. Compared to communicating with forcibly displaced and host communities, communicating with people in mixed movements is a much greater challenge, both technically and in the context of messaging. Their access to information channels varies along the route depending on internet connectivity and other factors. Moreover, the target audiences, when messaging about the dangers of smuggling and trafficking, should also include communities in the countries of origin and in the diaspora.

In a survey conducted for this report, key informants hoped for deeper engagement in CwC by UNHCR and partners and expressed support for the concept of a regional inter-agency CwC engagement. It would simplify the dissemination of information, avoid duplication of messages, enhance access to complete and up-to-date information on services, provide an interactive platform for two-way communication, and facilitate inter-agency cooperation.

KEY RESULTS AT A GLANCE

WITHIN UNHCR

FINDINGS

- UNHCR is widely respected and CwC messages are trusted among communities.
- There has been a steady increase in CwC efforts, including use of innovative tools.
- CwC and outreach are at different technical levels of development in different countries.
- There is a need for increased streamlining of CwC within and across operations and offices in MENA, while taking into account each specific context.
- The rapid increase in the number of call centres in MENA and Turkey and the use of WhatsApp has raised expectations among end users.

CHALLENGES

- Limited human resources for CwC and partial development or implementation of CwC policies in some field operations.
- CwC is not fully mainstreamed across the sectors, with unclarity on coordination structures.
- Lack of standardised clearing procedures of messages.
- Lack of systematic evaluations of the needs and information habits of different target audiences.
- Tailoring CwC tools and practices to the needs and information habits of different target audiences.
- Not differentiating between target audiences when using social media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support operations to develop and implement a dedicated CwC strategy in line with each country context, and in accordance with the UNHCR AGD Policy and AAP Operational Guidance.
- Provide a technical interface for CwC between UNHCR and other UN agencies, non-governmental-organisations (NGOs) and other key actors working with communities.
- Increase dedicated CwC and outreach resources and make them available to UNHCR and partners. Streamline information and content disseminated across diverse platforms, reducing redundancies and errors.
- Establish / reinforce a regional inter-agency CwC coordination.
- Provide CwC training for UNHCR staff, partners, and communities.

INTER-AGENCY

FINDINGS

- CwC inter-agency activities have increased across MENA, especially during COVID-19.
- Collaboration with partners is taking place on a project-to-project basis.
- Limited information sharing in real time between agencies.
- In many cases, decisions made at inter-agency level may not always cascade down to the frontline workers.
- Communities have trust in the information disseminated by international organisations.
- Consistent branding of UNHCR's and partners' information products increases the trustworthiness of the message.

CHALLENGES

- Most agencies lack staff with specific CwC expertise or training.
- Information sharing in real time between agencies.
- Uncoordinated messages and information reaching community end users.
- Synchronisation in dissemination and consistency of information across all actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve information flow and consistency of messaging to communities across agencies through CwC, enabling stakeholders to consolidate information in one location.
- Provide a technical interface for communication on CwC between UNHCR partners and actors advising and working with communities.
- Conduct comprehensive information and communication needs assessments across the countries in a harmonised and systematic manner, in coordination with relevant actors.
- Provide CwC training for UNHCR partners.

WITH PERSONS OF CONCERN

FINDINGS

- Information channels and tools used are not always adapted to the intended audiences.
- Face-to-face communication remains the preferred way of communication and is supplemented with virtual meetings.
- Communities are rapidly adapting to digital tools.
- Communication with community-based organisations and community leaders through WhatsApp and virtual meetings is increasing.
- There is still a digital divide among the community members, amplified by lack of financial means, technical, and language barriers.
- People with specific needs and diverse profiles face challenges in accessing information.
- There is a confusing number of information sources and materials, giving space for misinformation and rumours circulating in communities and social media.

CHALLENGES

- Limited adaptation of CwC tools to meet different needs of all communities.
- Multitude of languages among communities in the MENA region.
- Problems accessing feedback mechanisms.
- Maintaining confidence and trust of communities through ensuring tailored responses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Information channels should be technically and financially accessible to all end users.
- CwC tools and practices should be tailored to reach people with diverse profiles and specific needs including those in transit and remote or hard-to-reach areas.
- Increase the involvement of communities as end users in the production of tools and content and timeline of information.
- Consistent branding of information materials should be used to increase the credibility of the content.

ENHANCING CWC

While the number of information channels and communication tools are on the increase, the study indicates indicates the opportunity for attention on how messages are communicated to the envisaged groups.

Against the backdrop of the fast expansion of the use of social media, the need to encourage synergies between agencies in CwC and coordinate dissemination of information is even greater than before. This could address misinformation and rumors.

The research shows the opportunity for a unified approach among humanitarian actors. This would ensure consistency in messaging, address fake news, and increase in efficiency, with information from all agencies being available in one place, as underlined in the comments by key informants interviewed for this study:

- *"A common CwC approach would improve partners' reach to their PoC by enhancing the collective outreach and the synergy of the partners. Also, it would decrease the time lost in dealing with inquiries that are not related to their operation."*
- *"If partners can access information added by other partners, then this should help them provide better service to persons of concern in terms of who to refer them to or who to advise them to contact and also provide answers for questions that are not necessarily pertinent to the work of their organisation but of others."*
- *"There is a need for a common approach, not least to address fraudulent messages, fraudulent contacts, but also because there are no unified messages coming out."*
- *"If designed as a "one-stop-shop" this platform will bring information closer to persons of concern. It should also help cut costs by reducing the need to call different partners seeking information."*

This highlights the need for coordinated channels and tools and materials together, in a dynamic CwC forum for stakeholders (UNHCR and UN agencies, partners, and other key actors), enabling them to access CwC information, share agreed and accurate messages and information, communication materials and tools, and ultimately deliver effectively.

This would enable structured CwC lines and combined FAQs and information materials as well as branding all communication to ensure it is perceived as coming from a trusted source. Conflicting messages would be avoided and feedback from communities incorporated, tailoring the communication to their needs, thus leaving no one behind. It would also provide frontline workers with updated messages and information on how to manage expectations.

AIM

- Make information accessible to all stakeholders in real time
- Streamline CwC messages and information tools between agencies
- Facilitate and simplify two-way communication

APPROACH

- Coordinate messaging countering rumours and false information
- Advise and promote best practice in CwC

RESULTS

- Messages and information tools reach intended audiences
- Simplified access to services for persons of concern by consolidating existing tools
- CwC tools and practices tailored to the needs of different target audiences

NEXT STEPS

1

Reinforce CwC capacities

- Develop a regional handbook and toolkit.
- Provide CwC training for UNHCR staff and partners, particularly for those who work with people with specific needs and diverse profiles, including those in transit and remote or hard-to-reach areas.

2

Set up a system for monitoring regular feedback from end users, ensuring the inclusion of people with specific needs and diverse profiles.

3

Establish an audio-visual platform enabling information to be shared over video and podcast, with regular news broadcast facilities in different languages.

4

Update the Refugee Knowledgebase digital platform, ensuring

- Technical adaptation.
- Language versioning.
- Updating and uploading of new content.
- A test run of Refugee Knowledgebase within UNHCR followed by a test run with partners.
- Updating of the Refugee Knowledgebase smartphone app for refugees in collaboration with end users.

5

Support the creation of community of practice to support coordinated CWC.

A PILOT WITH POTENTIAL: THE REFUGEE KNOWLEDGEBASE DIGITAL PLATFORM

The Refugee Knowledgebase is a new multilingual pilot tool developed by UNHCR in MENA to share accurate and current refugee-related information, with a range of functionalities, including:

- Linking frequently asked questions with directory information for service providers and related media materials.
- Providing tiered access rights to UNHCR, partners, and the public, which presents up-to-date cleared content internally and with partners within an operation.
- Offering dashboard for monitoring and reporting CwC queries.
- Possibility for automatic updating of content on different platforms, including help.unhcr.org, smartphones, and social media.
- Dynamic tool for real-time information sharing among agencies.

Once fully developed, the Refugee Knowledgebase will enable the streamlining of information for UNHCR and partners and serve as an innovative digital inter-agency tool.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The rapidly changing humanitarian environment in MENA brings with it a growing need to enhance and expand protection outreach, and CwC, a field gaining increasing recognition in the region.

A range of organisations are using a mix of practices, methods, tools, and channels, from sharing messages and information about services and opportunities to proactively ensuring the engagement of the persons of concern to UNHCR and facilitate their feedback on issues that affect their lives, be they refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, stateless persons, returnees, people in mixed movements, or host communities.

This study on outreach and CwC activities currently applied by UNHCR and partners, in the region with a focus on considering how communication tools are accessible to and used by women, men, boys, girls, persons with disabilities, and persons with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. The mapping of the tools considered needs and preferred channels of communication of end users and identified means to further develop and enhance two-way communication.

The report explores the usefulness of a an ehanced coordination among various stakeholders and partners, which includes referrals and can be linked to existing UNHCR and inter-agency tools that provide services to affected communities.

A broad range of CwC-related data from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon (see Chapter 1), Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen (see Chapter 2) was reviewed, collected, and processed. For each country covered, the research team conducted a detailed stocktaking of three categories of tools and practices that can facilitate two way-communication: face-to-face communication, traditional, and digital tools, and assessed their usefulness for different categories of persons of concern to UNHCR.

The findings are seen from three perspectives, that of UNHCR, other agencies, and the community end users.

Service Brochure by UNHCR Egypt.
© UNHCR/ Rehab El Dalil

The findings from this report aim to also inform the design of a CwC action plan that would provide useful and relevant services for displaced and host communities efficiently and consistently. It proposes options to serve needs of communities and facilitate inter- agency knowledge-sharing and collaboration.

METHODOLOGY

This study relied on a mix of data collection methods which complemented each other and helped triangulate and validate qualitative and quantitative data.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD	SCOPE AND ANALYTICAL VALUE
Desk review	The desk review analysed CwC reports and policy and practice documents as well as materials and social media available to end users. It assessed the quantity and quality of information available to UNHCR's persons of concern on websites and social media in Arabic, English, Tigrinya, Amharic, Oromo, Somali and French across the 10 countries.
Online survey and follow-up interviews	An online survey was carried out among CwC practitioners within UNHCR operations in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen and followed up in several cases with interviews for clarification or completion of data obtained. It helped map the tools and practices used by offices for reaching different target audiences.
Semi-structured interviews with key informants	Key informant interviews were conducted with country and regional staff of the following agencies: UNHCR, Caritas, CESVI, DRC, IOM, IRC, NRC, PSTIC, UNICEF, UNODC, TdH, and WFP. They were asked both about their agencies´ own CwC policy and the potential for closer inter-agency collaboration.
Qualitative semi-structured interviews (in person and by telephone) combined with a survey	91 interviews with end users were carried out with eight different communities of refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt (Eritreans, Ethiopians, Nigerians, Somalis, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Syrians, and Yemenis). The PoC were asked how they personally access information, what their preferred channels are, how they communicate with UNHCR, its partners, and other agencies, and overall whether they feel well-informed. The interviews were complemented by a questionnaire for obtaining more detailed and comparable data.
Semi-structured in-depth interviews with key informants	12 in-depth interviews were conducted in person or over the phone with community leaders, who were asked about their strategies for obtaining and disseminating information in the communities and about their community members' communication levels and habits.

1

Operational contexts

1.1 ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH TO CWC IN UNHCR

All operational units in a UNHCR country operation incorporate CwC in their activities. Some operations have dedicated CwC units, others have individual CwC positions. Overall responsibility within UNHCR for CwC differs in the four country operations. This is a reflection of the situation globally within UNHCR, as CwC in some operations falls under Protection (as part of Community-based protection), in others under External Relations, or Programme. All four countries are at different stages of developing a CwC policy, or in ensuring all units embed CwC components in their country strategy.

Since 2013 MENA has led regular meetings between the operations in the Syria Response to share information and work towards improved coordination, including during return programmes.

1.2 INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

At the inter-agency level, CwC is often addressed as part of sector working groups, and in some countries, inter-agency coordination for CwC has dedicated mechanisms in place. In two of the countries (Egypt and Iraq), dedicated CwC Working Groups have been established.

In Egypt, UNHCR leads a CwC Working Group, established in 2015, as one of six sectoral working groups within the inter-agency refugee coordination mechanisms in the country.[1] It has representatives from various UN agencies as well as international and national NGOs. Overseen by the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG), the CWC WG convenes once a month to stay abreast of information needs of communities, develop coordinated messages to avoid duplication in outreach activities, reviews existing communication channels, and discusses new ones to improve two-way CwC.

Table 1. Most active partners working on CwC with refugees and/or other persons of concern to UNHCR (2020)

Partners	UNHCR Egypt	UNHCR Iraq	UNHCR Jordan	UNHCR Lebanon
UN Partners				
IOM	✓	✓		
UNFPA		✓		
UNICEF		✓		✓
WFP		✓		✓
NGOs				
CARE			✓	
Caritas	✓			✓
CRS				
DRC		✓		
Intersos		✓		✓
IRC		✓		
JOHUD			✓	
JRF			✓	
NRC		✓		✓
Oxfam		✓		
PSTIC	✓			
Save the Children	✓			
StARS	✓			
SWEDO		✓		
TdH	✓			✓

In Iraq, UNHCR co-leads with OCHA a CwC/AAP Working Group as part of the inter-cluster response, in which all clusters participate[2] and are responsible for mainstreaming CwC and AAP across their activities.[3] The mandate of the CwC/AAP Working Group, created in

1 UNHCR Egypt Fact Sheet July 2020

2 WASH, Protection, Child Protection, Mine Action, Shelter, Health, CCM, PSEA Network, NCCI and WFP

3 Humanitarian Response: Accountability to Affected Populations & Communication with Communities

Syrian refugee home visit by Caritas Egypt.
© UNHCR/ Scott Nelson

2019, stems from the Iraq Humanitarian Country Team's Protection Strategy, which recommended the upgrading of the previous CwC Taskforce into an amalgamated CwC/AAP Working Group under the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG). This was done with a view to increasing participation and collective ownership in all sectors, coordinating inter-sectoral initiatives and sharing information on best practices, lessons learned, and existing resources/tools. Furthermore, the CwC/AAP WG gathers partner resources for the development and dissemination of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials and acts as a repository for materials that are accessible to all clusters.

In Jordan, CwC is addressed through different thematic working groups as part of the inter-agency coordination refugee response structure in the country. The working groups meet monthly and share announcements and updates with refugees and agencies through a structured CwC platform. UNHCR coordinates with other agencies on messaging on common topics. In Zaatari camp, UNHCR also leads a Community Mobilization Working Group, whose work includes CwC components.

Some of the CwC content produced by different organisations and Information about the CwC inter-agency meetings is shared, with varying consistency, among agencies on the following reporting e-platforms: the dedicated platform for the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP),[4] the Syrian Refugee Operational Portal,[5] and HumanitarianResponse.Info.[6]

1.3 STRENGTHENING CWC COLLABORATION

Humanitarian and development agencies engage and communicate with refugee and host communities, adopting different approaches, in a range of situations and contexts. And increasingly, people on the move are becoming an integral part of the end users targeted by CwC activities.

Collaboration between partners is playing an important role in CwC in the MENA region. Agencies share information and messaging, support each other's campaigns, and collaborate at all stages of joint CwC activities and campaigns. NGO partners have close contact with refugee communities, which enables them to have a strong reach as well as provide feedback benefitting the operations.

The most important areas in which UNHCR and partners collaborate in CwC activities are sharing information materials and producing joint materials. They also plan joint CwC activities and campaigns, conduct joint surveys for different sectors, and in some operations share call centres and e-platforms.

From a larger perspective, information about a specific organisation's CwC work may be shared among sector members, particularly during inter-agency meetings, but it is not always clear how this is filtered down to the staff working on a daily basis with CwC, helplines, and call centres across all agencies.

4 3RP: Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan

5 Operational Portal: Syria Regional Refugee Response August 2020

6 Humanitarian Response: Iraq

The need for dedicated CwC staff among NGOs has also been raised during the research, to enable the organisations to meet the growing need of coordinating CwC both within the organisations and with partners, partly as technical staff are specialised in specific sectors and lack the relevant communications expertise.

1.3.1 TRADITIONAL PARTNERS

In all four countries, different NGOs partner with UNHCR depending on the country. Among the most active NGO partners in terms of CwC as indicated during the research were:

- **Egypt:** Caritas, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the Psycho-Social Services and Training Institute in Cairo (PSTIC), Saint Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS), Save the Children (SCF), and Terre des Hommes (TdH);
- **Iraq:** the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and Oxfam;
- **Jordan:** the Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development (ARDD), CARE, the Noor Al Hussein Foundation (NHF), the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD), the Jordan River Foundation (JRF), and Blumont;
- **Lebanon:** Caritas, Intersos, NRC, and TdH. Among UN agencies, IOM, UNICEF, and in particular WFP, work on CwC-related projects with UNHCR.

DRC

The work of the Danish Refugee Council is guided by the organisation's Accountability Framework, which includes a complaints and feedback mechanism for beneficiaries. DRC is active in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon.

> *"Through interventions in camp and host community settings and working both directly and through local institutions, DRC Jordan aims to ensure that its beneficiaries are active participants in programming in their own communities and not passive recipients of aid."*[7]

IOM

Of the four countries, IOM has its strongest CwC focus in Iraq,[8] deploying a dedicated CwC Officer. Field staff are being trained to interact better with communities in the spirit of AAP. The Community Response Map (CRM), an interactive feedback platform designed to simplify the processes of collecting, analysing, and visualising feedback, and ultimately enhancing community engagement and two-way communication, was implemented in 2017.[9] Six Community Resource Centres (CRCs) have been set up under the CCCM cluster in areas of return, designed to serve as coordination, information, and referral for IDPs, returnees and host community members.[10]

> *"Information is communicated to communities in different ways, including print material, FAQ, audio-messages, or videos depending on the local context and preferences of communities. In some cases, beneficiaries are trained and supported to develop and implement their own CwC activities, such as participatory theatre and community engagement videos. This bottom up-approach ensures the effectiveness of the CwC programme."*[11]

In the other three countries, IOM has dedicated helplines and a social media presence, as well as CwC activities in the camps in Jordan. In 2016 IOM launched the BOSLA information platform in Egypt, which currently has seven member organisations,[12] aimed to act as an online reference guide for migrant services across the North African region.[13]

WFP

For WFP in MENA, SMS is the primary channel for disseminating core information to communities. In Jordan and Lebanon, WFP shares call centres with UNHCR, with separate lines for food assistance, and is part of the Iraq Information Centre (IIC). Other tools include Dalili - دليلي ('my guide' in Arabic), a smartphone application in Lebanon that allows shoppers to have up-to-date information on food prices at WFP-contracted shops.[14]

> *"Affected people have a right to be actively involved in the decisions that affect their lives and engaging affected people in programme decisions makes food assistance more effective."*[15]

7 DRC Jordan Fact Sheet September 2019

8 Communicating With Communities - IOM Iraq

9 Community Response Map - Iraq

10 IOM Press Release 5 January 2018: Community Resource Centres to Consolidate Support for Returnee Reintegration in Iraq

11 Communicating With Communities - IOM Iraq

12 IOM, Save the Children International, Soryana for Training and Development, Habebit Alkhair Association For Development, Fard Foundation, Alrashad Charitable Organization, and Happy Yemen Initiative.

13 Press release December 2016: IOM Egypt Launches Revamped Migrant Information Website | IOM Egypt

14 Dalili: WFP Innovation Accelerator

15 Quote from WFP's Strategy for Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) (2016)

1.3.2 NEW PROSPECTS FOR COLLABORATION

As a result of the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants[16] and the ensuing Global Compact on Refugees,[17] the Netherlands launched the Prospects Partnership in December 2019, aiming for a paradigm shift when responding to forced displacement crises: moving from a humanitarian to a development approach.

> *"Improving the hosting and protection of refugees in countries in their region of origin, raising awareness of the dangers of irregular movement, and assisting governments in tackling human trafficking and smuggling, are all part of the aim."*[18]

To explore further how the Prospects partners can strengthen the collaboration in the MENA region, the research team interviewed some of them in regard to their community engagement and with the view of possible partnership on CwC.

ILO

> *"Migrant workers and their families will benefit from strengthened capacity to make informed choices."*

As is the case with UNODC, ILO's communication activities are mainly directed at partners within governments, other organisations, civil society, media etc. Communication with the target groups of the organisation is in the the form of information to for example migrant workers on their rights. An example is the FAIRWAY Middle East project, which targeted low-skilled migrant workers, seeking to address the interlinked structural, behavioural, and practical barriers to improved labour migration. One of the goals of the project was to improve access to information and support services for migrant workers throughout the migration cycle. [19]

OHCHR

The work of the UN Human Rights Office focuses on collaboration with governments, local authorities, civil society organisations and other so-called duty bearers, in order to improve the human rights situation. Although the Regional MENA Office also includes providing advice to rights-holders among its activities, OHCHR in MENA does not have a specific CwC programme.[20]

UNICEF

In accordance with its mandate, UNICEF's key audiences for Community Engagement (CE) are children and young people, with a special focus on vulnerable families and children with disabilities. Tools used for CE are FGDs, surveys, and tools tracking and monitoring short-term and long-term change.[21]

UNICEF is implementing community-engagement projects specifically targeting groups that were having difficulties in making their voices heard, such as youth, older people, and vulnerable groups. In the four countries under review, UNICEF has a considerable social media presence, and in some countries dedicated helplines.

UNODC

> *"Information can empower people at-risk and warn them about dangers and threats."*

The mandate of UNODC is to combat organised crime, and the main communication counterparts are operational partners, governments, UN agencies, NGOs, civil society. Human trafficking is however one of the areas where UNODC is also communicating directly with communities at-risk. To counter human trafficking in the MENA region, UNODC runs the Arab Initiative to Build National Capacities to Combat Human Trafficking in the Arab Countries. One aim of the initiative is to raise awareness of the crime and its devastating consequences on individuals and societies at large. [22]

16 The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants

17 The global compact on refugees: UNHCR Quick Guide

18 Government of Netherlands - Press release 18-12-2019: Netherlands takes joint action to support refugees and host communities with Prospects Partnership

19 ILO: The FAIRWAY Programme (Arab States)

20 OHCHR Human Rights Programme for the Middle East and Northern Africa Region

21 Communication for Development (C4D) | UNICEF Lebanon

22 UNODC: Human Trafficking Toolkit For Journalists - The Arab Initiative to Build National Capacities to Combat Human Trafficking in the Arab Countries (2017), State of Qatar, UNODC, League of Arab States

2

Communication tools and channels

2.1 FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

The study shows that UNHCR operations in all four countries, to a large extent, are using face-to-face as a two-way communication tool in their community outreach by holding FGDs, participatory assessments, targeted visits, door-to-door campaigns, and overall field and frontline work.

Face-to-face is especially important for vulnerable groups who often, for a variety of reasons, have more challenges than others in making their needs known through online media or call centres or cannot visit the organisations because of distances and transportation costs. In short, face-to-face meetings remain unrivaled as the most preferred two-way communication method.

CBP frontline workers play an important role in communication activities, working at reception centres, at helpdesks and mobile helpdesks, call centres, conducting home visits, and holding multifunctional community meetings with community leaders and other PoC. UNHCR Jordan disseminates CwC materials through its Info-Sharing Group, which brings together all messages in one platform, making sure frontline colleagues are on the same page.

And in Lebanon for instance, UNHCR has formed Community Reference Groups, comprising refugees with experience in journalism or video production who meet monthly with UNHCR to advise staff on the content of CwC information materials.

The four country operations all work with CBOs and community leaders, and many hold weekly multi-functional meetings.

In Egypt for instance, there are over 110 CBOs, and many of the NGOs such as TdH, PSTIC, Caritas, MSF, StARS, and SCF, are working closely with different community groups and leaders.

TdH, a child-protection agency, highlighted the importance of holding events as a way of connecting to the communities. Events are seen as important tools to strengthen community coherence, reinforce cultural traditions, and add some festivity. However, events also offer great opportunities for CwC activities, where organisations can have information booths, disseminate messages, and connect with community leaders, youth groups, women groups, and other grassroot activists. World Refugee Day, which usually is well attended in all refugee settings, is one such annual event which can be used for networking with different community groups.

> *"Even if they are not intended as communication methods, these events are important for increasing awareness and they are helping to increase communication channels and to connect with community networks. The groups we see on social media did not start online but have been built on networks that started at field level."*
>
> *TdH staff, Egypt*

The Psycho-Social Services and Training Institute in Cairo (PSTIC) has outreach volunteers who are trained to serve the communities in their own languages, sharing information face to face or over the phone and in CBOs, community centres, and other spaces where communities gather. Its Field Information Teams are based among the communities. And, as part of its outreach work, PSTIC also runs two WhatsApp trees. One shares information with community leaders, who then pass it on via their own community's WhatsApp groups. The other tree is run by the outreach volunteers. It has several groups to enable as many community members as possible to join. There are more than 100 groups currently running, which are used mainly by the Syrian and Yemeni communities.

2.2 TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND CHANNELS

Printed materials such as posters, leaflets, and banners are widely used in humanitarian operations both in rural and urban areas. Within multimedia, radio has traditionally been the most common communication tool in field operations all over the world, and among these four countries is used in Iraq and in Zaatari camp in Jordan.

Radio as a CwC tool is particularly useful in large refugee settlements, such as refugee camps. Radio stations

Table 2: Traditional CwC tools

UNHCR operation	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Lebanon
Printed materials				
Leaflets, posters, brochures	✓	✓	✓	✓
Multimedia				
Video	✓	✓	✓	✓
YouTube	✓	✓		✓
Radio & Podcast		✓	✓	
Telephone				
Helpline	✓	✓	✓	✓
Call centre	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bulk SMS	✓	✓	✓	✓

targeting refugees or run by refugees themselves are of great importance for community cohesion and are seen as a source of trusted information. At the same time, they provide a forum for dialogue and discussion in the form of live call-in programs. Local and community-based radio stations are playing an important role as a CwC tool in Iraq and Jordan.

Video is increasingly gaining ground as an effective CwC tool in all four countries. Videos giving information on all aspects of services and refugee protection are being produced by UNHCR and partners in many languages and are being shown in places where refugees gather and also on social media.

Telephone communications are also widely used in MENA, be they helplines/infolines, hotlines, call centres, and bulk SMS. Call centres, in particular, have developed into one of the most important communication channels, which also in some cases are being used in inter-agency collaboration with two or more agencies participating, such as the UNHCR/WFP call centre in Lebanon and the IIC in Iraq. UNHCR MENA has played an important role in rolling out call centres in the region, with the call centre in Jordan as a model.

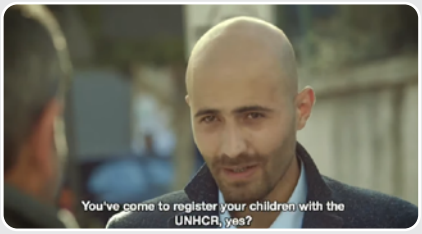
And moreover, as a result of the early "adoption" of UNHCR call centres in MENA, they have played an important role in planning call centres also in countries outside MENA.

Note there are overlapping uses of the words helplines and hotlines, and some consider the two interchangeable. A hotline is primarily used to imply a line that is available 24/7 and is frequently a mobile phone carried by the staff able to give immediate assistance, and sometimes referred to as an emergency line. A helpline is used here as a telephone service which offers help and information, but only open during office hours.

2.2.1 PRINTED MATERIALS

In these four countries, UNHCR developed a regional toolkit in 2013 as part of the Syria Response in order to enable field offices and partners to produce their own printed materials. It includes templates for posters, booklets, and signposts in English and Arabic with explanatory drawings suitable for illiterate persons. This enabled operations at the time to create printed material quickly and inexpensively for dissemination of key messages.

Information videos explaining access to healthcare for Syrians in Lebanon



A mini-drama to warn about fraud, on UNHCR's Refugees Lebanon YouTube channel

An information video from UNHCR Egypt's YouTube channel explaining registration in Tigrinya. The video is also available in Amharic, Arabic, Oromo, Somali, and English

In Egypt and Lebanon, printed material is distributed at refugee reception centres and by partners. In Jordan and Iraq, it is distributed at community centres both in urban settings and in camps.

In Jordan, the Child Protection and GBV sub-working groups, in collaboration with refugee and local communities, have jointly produced campaigns such as the AMANI campaign in 2014, aimed at influencing the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour of women, girls, men, and boys related to violence, abuse, and exploitation.

It provided a consistent pool of key messages and tools to be used and if needed adapted by organisations. Drawing on best practices and lessons learned from other contexts, the project was based on the notion that working together is better than working alone.[23]

2.2.2 MULTIMEDIA TOOLS: VIDEOS & AUDIO

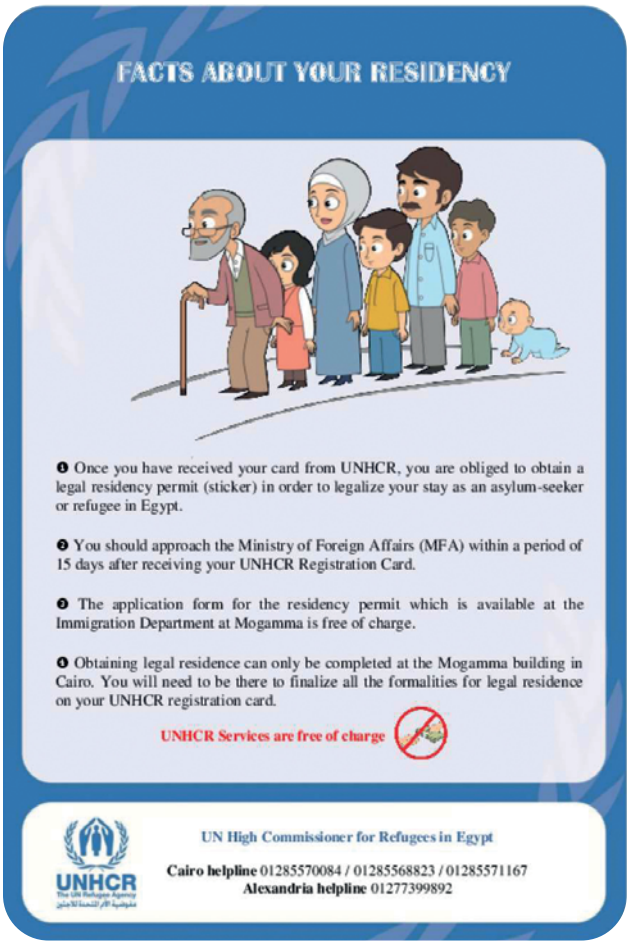
Information videos are used as communication tools by all UNHCR operations or their partners. The videos are shown at reception centres, community centres, or posted on social media via Facebook or YouTube. Among the subjects are assistance, registration, how to contact UNHCR and how to apply for asylum, education, health, and resettlement. Some operations are producing videos in many languages.

UNHCR Lebanon has the largest number of videos, the majority of which cover safety, residency, registration, and resettlement. In Jordan, UNHCR multimedia material is disseminated online on social media and via WhatsApp.

UNHCR Lebanon and UNHCR Egypt have dedicated YouTube channels. UNHCR Lebanon's channel posts videos on registration, protection and community services, health, and, more recently, on COVID-19 awareness. UNHCR Egypt's channel includes videos on applying for asylum in Egypt and specific information for Syrian, Iraqi, and African refugees on food assistance and health services. Jordan, on the other hand, does not have a dedicated Youtube channel for its videos.

> *"I think we need more videos that say what to do step by step."*
> Syrian woman

In Iraq and Jordan, local and community-based radio stations are disseminating information to communities. In Jordan, the refugee-run Zaatari radio



on 97.3FM[24] broadcasts refugee-relevant information, enabling listeners to call in with questions or to give their views on the issue under discussion, sharing stories between the refugee population and host-community as well as offering entertainment and podcasts available via SoundCloud.[25] UNHCR's Jordanian partner JOHUD's radio program Farah al-Nas hosts a weekly episode dedicated to UNHCR, raising issues of interest to refugees.

In Iraq, UNHCR ran a pilot project in 2016 – 2018 with BBC Media Action and Radio Nawa for a public radio service which broadcasts in Arabic and Kurdish, distributing radio kits to families displaced by the Mosul offensive, allowing them to receive broadcasts, participate in talk-back, and make informed decisions about their future.[26]

Some camps have radio stations broadcasting announcements, disseminating key messages, and interviewing experts to clarify current topics and expose any myths related to a subject of concern.

23 Amani Campaign Implementation Guide - Jordan (2015)

24 Zaatari Radio website

25 Zaatari Radio Soundcloud

26 UNHCR: Broadcasting hope on World Radio Day

2.2.3 TELEPHONE-BASED COMMUNICATION

A 2018 UNHCR survey among refugees in Lebanon showed that mobile phones are widely used by Syrian refugees. 94% of the respondents had access to a mobile phone.[27] The use of mobile phones among community members in Jordan is likewise high, at 85%, and there is widespread access to the internet and social media. Another study on the use of mobile phones among refugees in three countries found that 78% of responding refugees in Jordan owned an internet-enabled smartphone. It concludes that expanding mobile services is an opportunity that humanitarian organisations should spend time and resources embracing. [28]

The cost of a phone handset is the most significant barrier to mobile ownership as refugees have relatively limited livelihood opportunities, which makes it difficult to afford the upfront cost of purchasing a phone. However, it has also been shown that refugees manage to access mobile services in creative ways depending on their context: sharing or borrowing handsets and changing SIMs for the best deal – when their legal status and regulations allow.[29] In addition, interviews with key informers indicate that families living together may share phones and internet. The cost of mobile data is yet another barrier, and some agencies increasingly include the transfer of data packages as part of assistance provided to communities.

The study also revealed significant gender and disability gaps. The use of mobile phones was significantly lower among women than men, and for some groups, lack of literacy and digital skills, affordability, and charging were the main barriers to mobile phone use.

Through more sophisticated technical solutions providing detailed call centre metrics measuring the performance of the call attendants, the call centres are able to adapt their services, expand functions, and improve efficiency.

2.2.3.1 Call centres

UNHCR MENA has played an important role in rolling out call centres in the region, with the call centre in Jordan as a model. And moreover, as a result of the early "adoption" of UNHCR call centers in MENA, they have played an important role in planning call centers in countries also outside MENA. Through more sophisticated technical solutions providing detailed call centre metrics measuring the performance of the call attendants, the call centres are able to adapt their services, expand functions, and improve efficiency.

However, the degree to which call centre teams have access to detailed and updated FAQs varies between the operations. Updated information will allow for issues to be resolved by the call attendant without the need for referral. All four operations are striving to improve access to CwC for women and girls. Two of the call centres, Iraq and Lebanon, have the option of talking to a female staff member.

The call centre in Jordan was the first to be established in the region and has been a model for other operations. The Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system used in Jordan is deployed with varying degrees of sophistication by the other call centres. It enables a choice of languages and topics, updating telephone numbers, and gives automated responses to reduce the waiting time and the amount of abandoned and unanswered calls. To simplify access, the call centres provide a single number to call. Operations in Jordan and Iraq have toll-free numbers.

The Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS), a tool developed by UNHCR MENA, is used in Egypt, Iraq and Jordan to track calls through a ticketing system, facilitating follow-ups and referrals. RAIS provides a full profile of the caller, including all the types of assistance that a family receives. In Jordan, the automated IVR system is linked to RAIS. After entering the file number and a security code, the caller can access his or her status on issues such as home visits or appeals (for

ACHIEVEMENTS

Call centres adapted to better respond to increased demand as a two-way communication channel with PoC,

- Call centres in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon
- RAIS, developed by UNHCR MENA, for ticketing, facilitating follow-up and referrals as well as recording of complaints and concerns from community members (Egypt and Jordan)
- The IVR system deployed for automated answers in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon

[27] Cash Assistance In Lebanon - Accountability To Affected Populations (AAP), by Camealeon (2019), page 9

[28] GSMA: The digital lives of refugees: How displaced populations use mobile phones and what gets in the way (2019)

[29] *Ibid.*

Table 3: Call centres run by UNHCR and partners

UNHCR operation	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Lebanon
Opening year	2015*	2015	2014 / upgraded 2017	2015
Toll-free number		✓	✓	
Call centre – UNHCR	✓			
Call centre – UNHCR/WFP			✓	✓
Call centre with partners		✓		
Interactive Voice Response (IVR)	✓		✓	✓
RAIS ticketing and referral	✓	✓	✓	
ProGres	✓			
Access to standarised FAQ		unhcr.help.org	Info-Sharing Group platform	Project X
Languages provided	7**	4***	2	2
Number of call attendants	12	18	11	15 – 100 depending on volume of calls****
Option of male or female call attendant		✓	✓	
Number of monthly calls answered by call attendants	18,000	7,442	14,495	80,000
IVR with automated messages			275,085	
Opening hours – work days	✓	✓	✓	✓
Opening hours – weekends		✓		

* UNHCR Egypt has two in-house call centres: one based in Cairo and one in Alexandria covering the North Coast.

** English, Arabic, French, Oromo, Amharic, Tigrinya, and Somali.

*** English, Arabic, and two dialects of Kurdish.

**** The call centre is run by an external company which can provide additional call attendants as needed.

example if a decision has been made on an appeal for cash assistance). In Egypt, information from calls is also recorded in *ProGres*. The analytics and reports which are generated by both the IVR and the RAIS ticketing system are important protection tools, informing UNHCR's programmes and response. It should be noted that *ProGres* is also partly used in parallel as a recording tool.

The number of agencies partnering with UNHCR in the call centres vary. In Lebanon, UNHCR operates a joint call centre with WFP. In Iraq, several agencies are participating in the Iraq Information Centre (IIC), a country-wide centralised call centre which aims to consolidate access to information, resources, and referrals for all PoC in the country.

2.2.3.2 Helplines and hotlines

In addition to the call centres, UNHCR and partners run helplines, some employing both general informational lines as well as hotlines. Lebanon and Egypt in particular have a considerable number of helplines and hotlines. During the study, it was noted that Assistance, Child Protection, Health, and Psycho-social support are the most represented sectors.

Clusters in Iraq are holding specific sessions for women and girls that are not included in this chart. In the KRI, a GBV hotline was launched in 2018 by UNFPA and the General Directorate for Combatting Violence Against Women (GDCVAW). Survivors of GBV can call the 24-hour hotline to receive support, counselling, and referrals to community-based services and resources in the region.[30]

UNHCR Jordan's in-house call centre also runs dedicated Child Protection and GBV hotlines to report acts of violence committed against women and children. The hotlines work in English and Arabic.

30 '119, a free helpline for GBV Survivors and a Message of Hope in Kurdistan', UNFPA Iraq, September 2018.

2.2.3.3 Bulk SMS

A study on the use of mobile phones among refugees in Jordan concludes that the second most commonly used mobile service is SMS, after phone calls. 35% of refugees who are active phone users in Jordan send/receive SMS messages every day.[31]

However, receiving information via SMS is not for free. Qualitative findings in all contexts suggest that the cost of using SMS messaging is one of the biggest barriers for refugees to use this service, as well as the need for basic literacy. Many refugees in Lebanon are paying to receive SMS messages and calls. Likewise, in Egypt persons of concern must cover the cost of their SIM cards themselves. As a solution to this obstacle to communicating with PoC, UNHCR Jordan distributes SIM cards registered with UNHCR, enabling them to make free calls to the helpline, limited free calls to other UNHCR SIM cards, and calls with reduced fees to other lines on the network.

Another obstacle to efficient SMS communication is ownership and use of multiple SIM cards. Refugee FGDs have revealed that participants commonly own many SIM cards to take advantage of different promotions and cost-saving bundles and offers. This practice may prevent information from reaching the end user. All four operations use SMS to communicate with PoC to inform them about RSD, winter-assistance grants, and food and cash assistance. In Egypt this is done in partnership with WFP and Caritas. In Jordan and Lebanon, SMS is also used to inform about community service. Egypt is the only operation that carries out RSD and uses SMS to send information about interview dates.

UNHCR Jordan's partner Caritas used SMS to reach out to PoC with information about COVID-19 and how to contact the organisation during the crisis, in addition to other awareness-raising materials.

In Iraq (KRI), SMS is used to share information on cash-based interventions and mental health and psycho-social support but also to promote other tools such as the IIC and the help.unhcr website. More recently, COVID-19-related messaging was shared via SMS.

2.3 DIGITAL TOOLS

One must also keep the digital divide in mind. Use of social media is a natural way of communication for the early adapters who have the necessary knowhow and access, while it is a different situation for many vulnerable groups. Others simply may have difficulties in accessing these tools due to costs and internet limitations in many countries.

For all these reasons, it is important to continue to explore the possibilities of developing the potential of digital tools for CwC, while keeping in mind that many persons of concern to UNHCR and other affected community members still prefer face-to-face communication.

2.3.1 UNHCR DEDICATED WEBSITES

All four UNHCR operations use websites to disseminate information to persons of concern to UNHCR but there is no consistent means of accessing CwC information. Lebanon has a substantial dedicated CwC website, while Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq link to help.unhcr.org. UNHCR Jordan also links to the Services Advisor website.

Three of the UNHCR operations, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, are running country-specific versions of the UNHCR global website. Egypt and Jordan also have information for refugees (FAQs) linked from help.unhcr.org, while Iraq runs a page on the UNHCR global website which does not contain any CwC-related information or links.

- **In Egypt,** the UNHCR Egypt website has dedicated a main category on its menu bar to Info for Refugees, which has three sub-categories. Two link to external sites: the RSD website, which takes the user to a local UNHCR webpage enabling asylum seekers to find information about their RSD status, and the Frequently Asked Questions which links to help.unhcr.org. The third sub-category Information Materials contains posters and leaflets, including a service brochure in English, Arabic, and French available for download, as well as video tutorials explaining important procedures for refugees and asylum seekers. The page also links to UNHCR Egypt's YouTube channel, which posts informational videos in both English and Arabic.

- **In Jordan,** the UNHCR Jordan website has several pages of information for PoC on its main menu bar. The category What We Do has two out of three subcategories: The Help/Jordan page links to help.unhcr.org providing information about UNHCR's services in Jordan, and the Services Advisor page which links to the app which provides a list of partners with a map of where their services are being provided. The Services Advisor app gives up-to-date information on the location of specific humanitarian service providers.

[31] GSMA: The digital lives of refugees: How displaced populations use mobile phones and what gets in the way (2019)

UNHCR's Helpline Centre in Amman, Jordan.
© UNHCR/Annie Sakkab

Under another main category, Get in Touch, the subcategory Useful Numbers for Persons of Concern lists addresses and contact numbers of UNHCR offices in Jordan, including the UNHCR Jordan call centre, as well as the numbers for the two dedicated helplines, one for detention, and one line for child protection and GBV. It also provides the number to a legal aid emergency line run by UNHCR's partner ARDD which operates the helpline 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- **In Lebanon,** the UNHCR Lebanon website is mainly targeting donors, partners, and media, but carries a link from the Basic Assistance category to this dedicated CwC website.

  There is a dedicated UNHCR-run website Refugees-Lebanon.org for CwC-related information in English and Arabic. Refugees-lebanon.org carries news items, information about UNHCR's and partners' services, links to radio programs and videos, and a contact form to reach UNHCR. The main page also has the subcategories

  Beware of Fraud, FAQ, Leaflets and Posters, and Call Us, which gives detailed contact information for UNHCR and all partners. This also provides a service directory, with UNHCR Lebanon partners' different helplines and infolines. The Health section of the website contains information about the Ask Noor chatbot available through the Facebook mobile app which gives information about health services.

- **In Iraq,** persons of concern can access information through the Help.org website. **The help.unhcr.org website** is designed for refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons to find out where they can get help in the country they are in, as well as information on the asylum procedure in that country and their rights and duties there. Each operation uploads the most important protection information for their populations of concern, providing the refugees with accurate and tailored information consolidated through one resource. The website provides information for 48 countries in the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.[32]

2.3.2 SOCIAL MEDIA

A self-assessment of social media systems and strategies in MENA in 2019 showed that UNHCR is increasingly focusing on the use of mobile phone technology and digital platforms in response to the growing use of mobile phones. It also noted that persons of concern to UNHCR may receive multiple messages on the same topic from UNHCR and partners, leading sometimes to a lack of clarity.

> *"As we don't use the internet, when we have questions, we ask our community leaders."*
>
> South Sudanese woman in Egypt

32 UNHCR Innovation Service: Help.unhcr.org: a platform for asylum seekers to access information

Table 4. Digital tools deployed in the four countries

UNHCR operation	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Lebanon
Websites				
UNHCR country website	✓		✓	✓
CwC website				✓
Help.org	✓	✓		
RSD website	✓			
Apps				
Services Advisor App			✓	
Chatbot			✓	✓
Social media				
Facebook	✓	✓	✓	✓
Instagram (mainly aimed for the general public)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Twitter (mainly aimed for the general public)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Viber		✓		
WhatsApp & WhatsApp trees	✓	✓	✓	✓
Other				
Email for referrals	✓	✓		
Virtual meetings	✓			

Many find communicating with organisations through social media difficult, not least because agency staff do not have time to engage in conversations with refugees via Facebook or WhatsApp, and the relatively high internet costs and technical constraints experienced in some of the countries. Concerns were also raised about how persons with specific needs and diverse profiles can access protection information and the assistance that they need.

- UNHCR's Facebook pages for Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq post content for both donors and communities. In Iraq and Lebanon, the information posted targets donors and the public more often than PoC.
- UNHCR Egypt has two dedicated Facebook pages for PoC, in English and Arabic respectively.
- In addition to its official social media accounts, UNHCR supports community-run Facebook groups for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan by ensuring they post accurate information and by training their moderators.
- There are a growing number of social media pages run by CBOs, refugee student groups and others, posting information about services and procedures.
- UNHCR's social media channels are used as one-way channels. In Jordan, an automated reply directs the user to the call centre.

There is a significant difference in the number of social media followers among the four countries. While Lebanon is the country with the highest number of helplines, it has a more limited number of followers on social media accounts.

2.3.3 ROLE OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The communities play a substantial role on social media in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. The number of Facebook and WhatsApp trees and groups is rapidly growing. Different community organisations and "influencers" among the refugee communities regularly post information for refugees, both informative content and complaints. The majority repost a mix of content from different organisations as they come across it.

Some community Facebook pages are supported by UNHCR. In Lebanon, the أنا سوري (I am a Syrian in Lebanon) Facebook group was started by a UNHCR outreach volunteer and has developed into one of the most active places refugees can seek information about their rights, with 257,918 members, and has expanded into five pages covering different regions across the country. The moderators have been trained by UNHCR and work with the organisation to create Q&As, disclaimers and standard answers. The information provided on the page is taken from the refugees-lebanon.org website. The pages all allow direct messaging, thus acting as two-way channels.

In Jordan, UNHCR supports three community-run Facebook groups for urban PoC in an informal manner, providing the groups with verified information about services and procedures which they can disseminate. These are Syrian Diaries in Jordan, Syrians Gathered in Jordan, and Syrians' Affairs in Jordan, with 60,000, 65,000, and 45,000 followers respectively. The groups share UNHCR content and alert UNHCR about rumours which may surface. UNHCR is also working to establish a WhatsApp group with them.

Arabic classes for non-Arabic speaking African refugees and asylum seekers in Cairo, Egypt
© UNHCR/ Pedro Costa Gomes

2.3.4 WHATSAPP TREES

Whatsapp trees are actively used in the four countries as one- or two-way communication channels to cascade information to and from UNHCR and partners via established groups. It makes it possible to speedily share information on services available, announcements, and addressing rumours. They also reported using WhatsApp to share information in formats that are accessible to vulnerable groups, such as audio for visually impaired persons or visual material for illiterate persons.

- **UNHCR Egypt**
  WhatsApp trees was started as part of UNHCR Egypt's COVID-19 response to share official information. It now maintains a WhatsApp group with over 100 diverse community leaders and youth volunteers. UNHCR CBP staff have also joined 44 more refugee WhatsApp groups with over 7,000 members to continue direct messaging to the communities.[33]
- **UNHCR Jordan**
  WhatsApp trees are extensively used as a two-way channel to connect with protection actors, community volunteers and community centres. The Bridges of Communication group and UNHCR jointly facilitate a WhatsApp tree, which acts as a two-way channel for the community leaders to refer vulnerable cases and feed community updates back to UNHCR, for example alerting them to a rumour, for which the External Relations Unit creates a counter-message for the community leaders to disseminate through the tree.
- **UNHCR Iraq**
  In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, UNHCR's partner SWEDO uses WhatsApp to manage outreach volunteers in each sub-office.
- **UNHCR Lebanon**
  The first UNHCR operation in the region to begin using WhatsApp trees. Its WhatsApp network consisting of refugee and Lebanese focal points receive information from the refugees-lebanon.org website as the central, trusted source of information.

  The WhatsApp network consists of 9,000 focal points each in a one-way channel managed by a Protection supervisor.

33 'Communicating with Communities during COVID, and what are they telling UNHCR?', UNHCR MENA, April 2020, p.7.

ALGERIA, LIBYA, MOROCCO, TUNISIA, TURKEY, AND YEMEN

1

Operational contexts

1.1 ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH TO CWC IN UNHCR

In the majority of the country study, CwC is the responsibility of the Protection Unit (normally as part of Protection Outreach), in coordination with a multifunctional team including External Engagement, Programme, and other units. The Turkey operation is the only one with dedicated CwC staff. All six operations are at different stages of developing a CwC policy or strategy, or in ensuring all units embed CwC components in their country strategy.

1.2 INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

In the six countries under review, inter-agency coordination of CwC activities normally take place within specific sectorial working groups or clusters, as inter-agency coordination structures dedicated to CwC do not yet exist. However, in Turkey (UNCER the UNHCR regional Bureau for Europe) and in Yemen, efforts have been made at establishing formal CwC coordination mechanisms.

During the refugee crisis in South-East Turkey, a CwC Technical Taskforce for South-East Turkey was set up to coordinate inter-agency communication activities. It was anticipated that this initiative would be replicated at the national level, but that has not yet happened.[34] However, UN and NGO partners are coordinating their communication activities targeting Syrian refugees in Turkey through the CwC Task Force which is part of the 3RP. The most active UNHCR partners in CwC are the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC), WFP, and UNICEF. Recent joint activities include Services Advisor, an interactive map that indicates services available to the target audience throughout the country. Recently, closer cooperation between WHO and other agencies was necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.[35]

The crisis in Yemen has brought to the fore accountability dilemmas and the importance of collective approaches to CwC in a complex humanitarian emergency. In Yemen, CwC is more complicated than in many other humanitarian operations. 80% of the population are dependent on humanitarian assistance, hundreds of thousands have become internally displaced, and access to affected communities is hampered by political and security constraints. NGOs report that affected communities in Yemen often do not know how to prioritise their needs. When assistance arrives, they feel they should take anything they can get even if they do not have a critical need for it because they feel insecure about when it will be delivered again. This shows the importance of a coordinated CwC and outreach effort to build confidence.[36]

During the Yemen emergency in 2015, international agencies were ready to capitalise on the experience of previous crises and the progress made in CwC. A Community Engagement Working Group (CEWG) was established which agreed on a framework for AAP as well as a dedicated call centre. However, these initiatives have so far not been fully implemented because of the political and security situation in the country which has obstructed efforts to establish an inter-agency coordination mechanism for CwC.[37] Still, international humanitarian actors in Yemen express a strong interest in collective action to facilitate better communication with affected populations.[38]

34 Turkey Inter-Agency CwC Toolkit
35 UNHCR Flash fact sheet: UNHCR Turkey response during the COVID-19 pandemic (July 2020)
36 Accountability dilemmas and collective approaches to communication and community engagement in Yemen (2020)
37 *Ibid.*
38 *Ibid.*

Number of refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, and IDP returnees per country 2020*

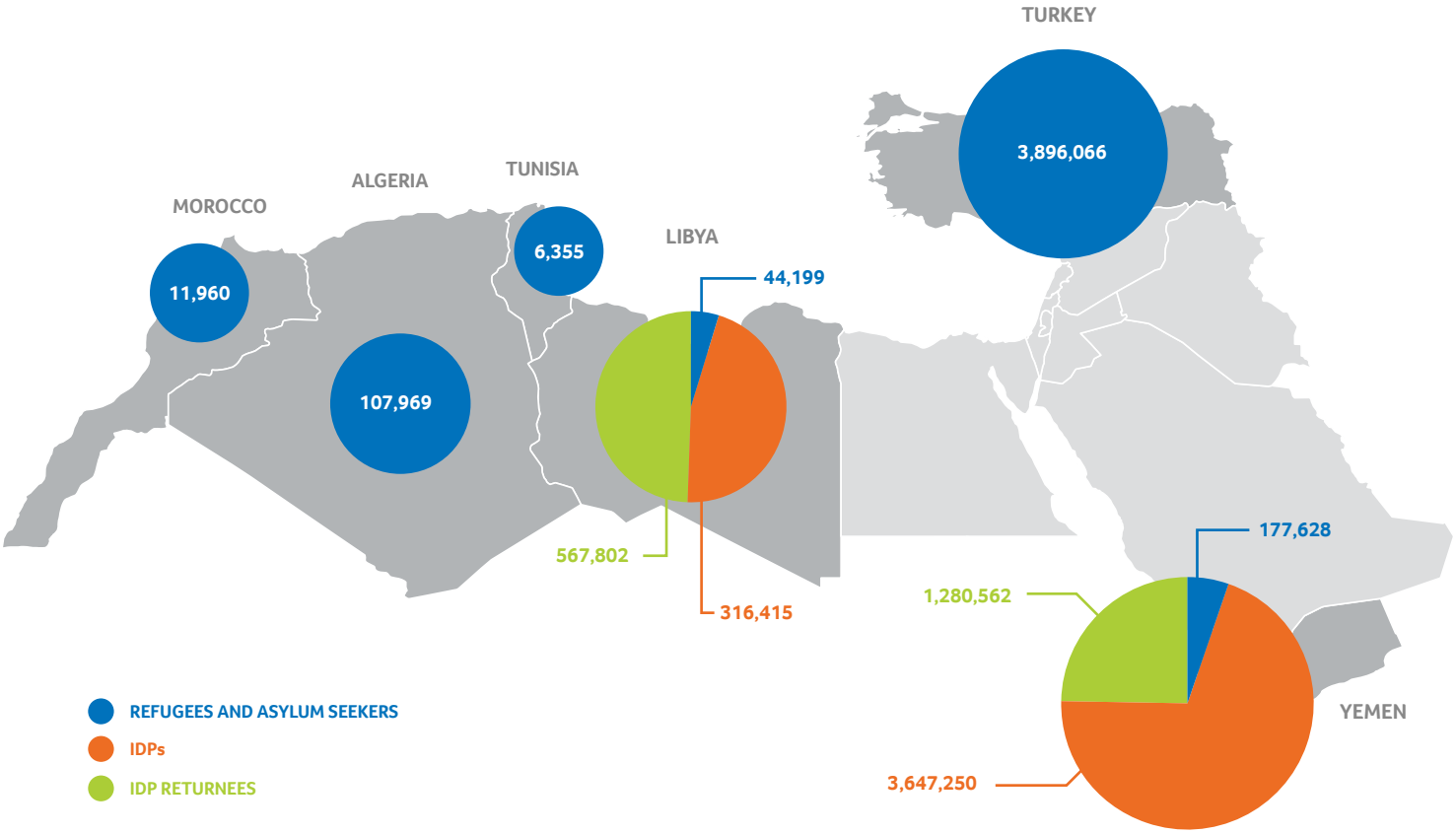


Table 8. Top countries of origin 2020

ALGERIA

WESTERN SAHARA	98,600
SYRIA	7,757
CAMEROON	357
YEMEN	257
GUINEA	225

LIBYA

SUDAN	15,299
SYRIA	14,536
ERITREA	5,432
PALESTINE	3,823
SOMALIA	2,581

MOROCCO

SYRIA	4,160
GUINEA	1,248
YEMEN	914
CAMEROON	991
IVORY COAST	935

TUNISIA

IVORY COAST	2,238
SYRIA	1,997
SUDAN	284
ERITREA	264
GUINEA	261

TURKEY

SYRIA	3,576,370
IRAQ	174,524
AFGHANISTAN	117,595
IRAN	27,577

YEMEN

SOMALIA	151,310
ETHIOPIA	15,343
SYRIA	4,028
IRAQ	3,394
ERITREA	1,847

*Sources: UNHCR Morocco fact sheet (September 2020), UNHCR Operational Portal, Tunisia (December 2020), UNHCR Operational Portal, Libya (October 2020), UNHCR Turkey Operational Update (November 2020), UNHCR Operational Portal, Yemen (February 2019)

1.3 COLLABORATION WITH PARTNERS

All six countries have complex operational environments, and each organisation participating in the refugee/IDP response faces a multitude of challenges in communicating with affected communities due to the sheer size of the populations, their wide geographical dispersal, the rapid mobility of groups in mixed movements, the diversity of the communities, security concerns, and finally, limited capacity of both staff and resources. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified the need for stronger CwC collaboration between UNHCR and partners.

Collaboration among organisations include planning of joint activities and campaigns, sharing information and messaging, conducting joint surveys for different sectors, and in some operations, sharing call centres. Collaboration is taking place on a project basis and key informants expressed the need for dedicated CwC resources both in UN agencies and among NGO partners to enable the organisations to meet the growing need of coordinating CwC both within organisations and with partners, as operational staff lack the relevant communications expertise in many countries.

And in the context of mixed population movements which all six countries are facing, collaboration among partners is essential to meet the challenge of establishing a functioning mechanism for communicating with people on the move.

UNHCR and IOM has been conducting joint counseling sessions since 2018 to ensure that both migrants and refugees are making informed decisions with regards to their rights, responsibilities and the options they have.

UNHCR's most active CwC and outreach partners are listed in Table 2. Algeria stands apart with the unique situation in the Tindouf camps, where UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and 18 international and national NGOs are working closely with the Sahrawi Red Crescent, Sahrawi authorities, and civil society in a participatory approach where the refugee communities manage the camps themselves.[39]

Table 5. Most active partners working on CwC and outreach (2020)

Partners / UNHCR operation	Algeria	Libya	Morocco	Tunisia	Turkey	Yemen
UN Partners						
IOM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
UNFPA		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
UNICEF	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
UNODC	✓					
WFP	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
WHO		✓	✓		✓	✓
NGOs						
AIHR/IADH				✓		
ACTED		✓		✓	✓	✓
AMAPPE			✓			
CARE						✓
Caritas	✓		✓		✓	✓
CESVI		✓				
CRA	✓					
CTR				✓		
DRC	✓	✓			✓	
FOO			✓			
Green Tea	✓					
HI	✓					
Intersos						✓
IRC		✓	✓		✓	✓
MdM	✓			✓	✓	
NADA	✓				✓	
NRC		✓				
Oxfam	✓					✓
QRCS						✓
SRC	✓					
TAMSS				✓		
TdH			✓			
TRC					✓	
TT				✓		

[39] UNHCR Global Compact on Refugees Digital Portal: Algeria

2

Communication tools and channels

The operational contexts differ in the six countries under review, and consequently, the use of CwC tools and channels differ both in CwC and community outreach. Face-to-face and traditional tools, especially printed materials, telephones, and bulk SMS are being used to a large extent in all the countries, while the use of digital tools and social media varies depending on the prevalence of smartphones among the communities, internet connectivity, and even political considerations. Turkey stands out among the countries covered, having a CwC specialist team.

The CwC tools being used can also differ for communities within one country's operation. For instance, in the UNHCR operation in Algeria, face-to-face, engagement with CBOs, and individual SMS are considered the most effective method to reach communities in the Tindouf camps, while for the urban refugees in Algiers, bulk SMS and the UNHCR helplines are more important.

Turkey and Yemen are examples of two very different operational contexts when it comes to the use of digital tools. Turkey has a dedicated CwC unit and makes extensive use of social media, while in Yemen, lack of internet access and the extreme poverty of the affected populations are obstacles to an effective use of digital tools. Still, both country operations have in common extensive use of physical community outreach methods, particularly face-to-face, which remains the preferred communication method of affected communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic opened the door for enhanced CwC efforts. Traditional tools such as hotlines, call centres, and bulk SMS were expanded and new innovative tools, such as virtual meetings with community leaders and communities, were applied in all the operations. According to key informants, the use of virtual meetings will not be restricted to the COVID-19 crisis but will remain and be further developed as a CwC tool.

The research has shown the need for a better understanding of the communication preferences and needs of the affected populations in their different environments – in humanitarian emergencies like Yemen and Libya, in protracted refugee situations like the Sahrawis in Algeria, widely dispersed like in Morocco, and in mixed population movements. Through surveys, participatory assessments, and FGDs, CwC tools and channels as well as outreach methods can be better adapted to the specific needs of people in different situations.

> *"The main barriers faced by refugees, asylum seekers, displaced Yemenis, and host community members in accessing information are the lack of phones, electricity, and lack of internet."*
>
> UNHCR Report: Understanding how UNHCR engages with Communities in Yemen, September 2020.

2.1 FACE-TO-FACE

Face-to-face communication is defined as outreach work in refugee communities or with other affected populations, consisting of community meetings, FGDs, home visits, and other direct meetings with affected people. These key community-based protection tools are usually conducted by humanitarian staff in the field or by ROVs. The study shows that face-to-face is one of the most common two-way communication tools in the UNHCR operations under review. This is the case both in country operations with advanced CwC tools and channels such as Turkey and those with less developed infrastructure such as Yemen.[40] During the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face has seen a transformation into a partly digital tool, with all six operations organising virtual meetings with community leaders and CBOs and virtual FGDs with various community groups.

- For the UNHCR operation in **Algeria**, face-to-face is the preferred CwC tool in the Tindouf camps, where community leaders and CBOs are the main counterparts of humanitarian agencies in reaching the Sahrawi refugee population. However, face-to-face communication with urban refugees is more complicated due to limited access of UNHCR and other humanitarian actors to certain areas of the country and to the communities themselves. Hence, the use of other CwC tools, such as SMS, is more predominant.

[40] Understanding how UNHCR engages with Communities in Yemen (2020)

Syrian refugee family, Turkey.
© UNHCR/Emrah Güre

- In the UNHCR **Libya** operation, face-to-face is the most common of all communication tools and outreach methods. It is being implemented at community meetings, FGDs, and home visits and managed by field staff or ROVs.

- In **Morocco**, with refugees and asylum seekers spread all over the country, face-to-face communication is a challenge, especially with communities in remote areas difficult to reach. The UNHCR Morocco operation has therefore increased its number of community volunteers from eight ROVs in four cities to 22 refugees in 11 cities.[41]

- In **Tunisia**, face-to-face is the most efficient communication tool because many refugees and asylum seekers have limited access to phones or internet but are on the other hand living in the greater Tunis area and easy to reach physically. Face-to-face activities include community meetings, FGDs, home visits, as well as recreational activities with different support groups.

- The UNHCR **Turkey** operation uses face-to-face communication such as community meetings and events, FGDs, outreach volunteers, partner activities, and refugee platforms/spaces to gather and disseminate information and get feedback from refugees on specific topics. As part of UNHCR's Policy on AGD, UNHCR Turkey conducts regular participatory assessments.[42] To effectively manage outreach through volunteers, the ROV programme was established in Turkey 2016. The programme complements and extends outreach to refugees in 15 of the 81 provinces. ROVs help to assist and identify vulnerable refugees and inform them about their rights, thus strengthening direct contact and dialogue with refugees.[43]

- In **Yemen**, face-to-face is on the one hand the preferred communication tool of the communities, but on the other hand challenging for UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies because of the political and security situation. For example, the hierarchical political structure may make IDPs reluctant to disclose their needs if they feel intimidated by their political or clan leaders.[44]

> *"Yemen is even more difficult than Afghanistan. There, we could go and have focus group discussions. Here it is unique. There are layers of approvals that you need to secure from authorities. We need those approvals and then even if we get them, they can get cancelled at any point. We can't pick up notebooks and go to the field and find out what is needed."*[45]
> NGO aid worker in Yemen

41 UNHCR Country Portfolio Evaluation: Morocco

42 UNHCR Turkey fact sheet (July 2019)

43 UNHCR ROV External Update (February 2017)

44 Accountability dilemmas and collective approaches to communication and community engagement in Yemen (2020)

45 *Ibid.*

2.2 TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND CHANNELS

Under the term traditional communication tools and channels are counted printed materials, helplines/ hotlines, call centres, SMS, multimedia (radio and video). These are to varying degrees being used in the six UNHCR country operations under review.

Table 6. Traditional CwC tools

UNHCR operation	Algeria	Libya	Morocco	Tunisia	Turkey	Yemen
Printed materials						
Leaflets, posters, brochures	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Multimedia						
Video	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
YouTube			✓			
Radio & Podcast			✓	✓	✓	
Telephone						
Helpline/ Hotline	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Call centre		✓			✓	
Bulk SMS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

2.2.1 PRINTED MATERIALS

The situation is similar in all six UNHCR operations under review, with the widespread use of printed materials for information purposes. All six country offices are using general UNHCR printed materials, but also producing country-specific posters, leaflets, and brochures.

- In **Algeria,** UNHCR uses a variety of printed materials: brochures, flyers, posters, billboards. Dissemination of printed materials through outreach activities is the most important CwC channel both in the Sahrawi camps and in the urban setting. Printed materials are distributed at refugee reception centres, by partners, and by outreach volunteers and frontline workers in the camps. The languages are Arabic, French, English, and Spanish.

- In **Libya,** UNHCR disseminates posters, leaflets, and brochures in community centres, detention centres, and public spaces.

- In **Morocco**, the Protection and External Engagement units are collaborating to design posters and other printed materials to be distributed in reception centres and the communities. Languages used are Arabic, English, and French.

- UNHCR **Tunisia** distributes brochures, leaflets, and posters in several languages at UNHCR and partners' offices, as well as at community centers.

- In **Turkey,** the CwC unit at UNHCR produces posters, leaflets, and brochures to be disseminated to refugees and partners.[46] The variety of languages is especially high in the Turkey operation, with up to seven languages being used, depending on the context (Turkish, English, Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, French, Russian).[47]

- In **Yemen**, printed materials are being produced both for IDPs and other affected Yemeni populations and for refugees and asylum seekers. The main languages are Arabic, English, and Somali.

2.2.2 MULTIMEDIA TOOLS: VIDEO AND AUDIO

Video and audio are being used more sparingly than printed materials. Refugees and asylum seekers with access to the internet are being directed to UNHCR websites, where general videos can be found. The UNHCR operations in Turkey and Morocco are however producing their own operation-specific informational videos.

- In **Algeria**, informational videos are being shown in refugee reception centres in Algiers, but less commonly in the camps. Registration procedures, protection messages, and risk-related mixed movements are among the topics covered. Sahrawi state TV and radio are active in Tindouf, but are not generally used by humanitarian agencies for CwC purposes. However, the humanitarian community has been supporting TV and radio campaigns on COVID-19-related topics on Sahrawi TV and radio.[48]

- UNHCR **Libya** has also used TV and radio for disseminating information to refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs, most recently on COVID-19-related issues.

- UNHCR **Morocco** produces animated videos on services provided and procedures with UNHCR and partners. Videos are shown in refugee reception

46 UNHCR Turkey Operational update (February 2020)

47 *Ibid.*

48 COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESPONSE: Refugees from Western Sahara, Tindouf, Algeria (April 2020)

areas but also uploaded on YouTube. In addition, UNHCR Morocco launched the video AMAL program on their YouTube channel, promoting the empowerment of child and youth refugees by UNHCR, IOM, and UNICEF. The office also supported refugees in creating a radio spot.

- UNHCR **Tunisia** uses videos during CBP activities and group counselling. UNHCR and its partners use videos to ensure the diversification of the materials used for training, awareness raising sessions, as well as recreational activities or counselling for specific groups (i.e. GBV).

- UNHCR **Turkey**, the only one of the six operations with a dedicated CwC unit within Protection, is producing operation-specific videos which can be seen on the country website, such as animation videos showing how to call the helpline, how to use the HES (Hayat Eve Sığar) mobile app to obtain a public transportation ticket and explaining the online tool Service Advisor.[49] Turkey has also launched weekly news podcasts on Facebook.

2.2.3 TELEPHONE-BASED COMMUNICATION

Telephony - helplines, hotlines, call centres and bulk SMS – is the backbone of CwC in all six countries under review, because phones are the most common communication tool among refugees and asylum seekers. For example, 97% of refugee respondents in a survey in Libya said they had access to a phone. [50]

In response to the COVID-19 emergency, the number of hotlines and the use of bulk SMS increased in all operations, and a new inter-agency call centre was opened in Libya.

2.2.3.1 Call centres

Two of the six UNHCR country operations, Libya and Turkey, have functional call centres with full-time call attendants answering calls, responding to questions, and referring complaints or enquiries to dedicated units or agencies and in Yemen, a UNHCR call centre was briefly operational in 2015-2016.

In Libya there are two humanitarian call centres. In August 2020, UNHCR and NRC opened a joint call centre for rapid direct communication with affected communities across Libya, handling calls in English and Arabic, open 8:00 – 16:30 five days a week (Sunday – Thursday). The call centre has a team leader (NRC) and two call attendants, one from UNHCR and the other from NRC. Enquiries are registered and answered through return calls. Most queries are about registration and resettlement.[51]

In February 2020, the inter-agency call centre Tawasul was opened. Affected populations can call toll-free to obtain information on humanitarian assistance programmes, submit their feedback, and get referrals to the agencies best suited to handle their needs. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic it has also functioned as a nationwide COVID-19 information channel.[52]

The Turkey operation has one call centre, the UNHCR Counselling Line, for refugees and asylum seekers in the whole country, which was established in 2017. The call centre has dedicated counsellors trained to answer queries on the full spectrum of rights, obligations, services, and procedures relating to refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey, as well as to make any necessary referrals for follow-up action.[53] Since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the UNHCR Counselling Line has been operating in full teleworking mode with 46 operators. Callers can receive counselling in Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, and English, and advisors who speak French, Dari, Pashto, Urdu, Kurdish, Uzbek, and Somali are available upon request.[54]

The call centre is equipped with interactive voice response (IVR) which allows callers to select the language of their preference and the line that addresses their queries. There are two separate lines dedicated to special enquiries, one to address queries related to complaints and fraud-related complaints, and the other for GBV issues. The IVR navigates the callers to the appropriate counselling line. It is open Monday - Thursday 09:00 -17:00, and Fridays 09:00 - 16:00.

The case of the UNHCR call centre in Yemen illustrates the obstacles that efforts at implementing CwC can encounter in humanitarian emergencies. The humanitarian call centre Tawasul was established by UNHCR and AMIDEAST in late 2015. This was the first of its kind in Yemen and shared humanitarian information through a tollfree number five days a week. Although the call centre was popular and received more than 1,000 calls per month on questions concerning medical issues, food distribution, and requests for individual

49 UNHCR Turkey Operational Update (June 2020)

50 Emergency Telecommunications Cluster – Common Feedback Mechanism

51 UNHCR Libya Update (August 2020)

52 Emergency Telecommunications Cluster – Common Feedback Mechanism

53 UNHCR Turkey CwC fact sheet (July 2019)

54 UNHCR Turkey Operational Update (May 2020)

protection, a few months later it was suspended by the authorities and closed in June 2016.[55]

2.2.3.2 Helplines and hotlines

A helpline is a telephone service which offers help and information, but only open during office hours. A hotline is a line available 24/7, frequently a mobile phone carried by staff able to give immediate assistance (sometimes referred to as an emergency line).

UNHCR and partners in all six countries run helplines for advice and hotlines for urgent protection and other issues. During the COVID-19 situation, the number of helplines and hotlines has been expanded.

- For the urban refugees and asylum seekers in **Algeria**, UNHCR has one general helpline, working five days a week, one 24/7 emergency hotline, and one line for community-based protection issues, working two days a week. Languages are Arabic, French, and English. There is also a separate helpline for the Sahrawi refugees in Tindouf. Other UN agencies with helplines for affected communities are IOM and UNICEF, and there are four NGOs with helplines, among them the Algerian Red Crescent.[56]

- In **Libya**, apart from UNHCR, four other UN agencies have helplines/hotlines for affected communities (IOM, UNFPA, WHO, WFP). There are 11 NGOs in Libya with helplines, including Caritas and ICRC. Moreover, through CESVI, the UNHCR Libya operation has dedicated helplines for the provision of different types of assistance such as food, cash, and health assistance.

- In **Morocco,** UNHCR has one helpline and five hotlines for specific emergency assistance, such as a hotline for women and a hotline for detention issues. Languages are French, English, and Arabic. IOM also has a helpline, as do 10 NGOs. There are services for rescue at sea by Alarm Phone and the Morocco Marine Rescue Organisation.

- In **Tunisia,** UNHCR offices in Tunis, Sfax and Zarzis have dedicated phone numbers for refugees. The Tunisian Refugee Council (CTR) operates several helplines/hotlines on behalf of UNHCR in various locations offering remote protection services, set up to deal with the increased number of calls during the COVID-19 pandemic.[57] In addition, AIHR/IADH as well as IOM, UNFPA, and UNICEF provide helplines for refugees and migrants.[58]

- In **Turkey**, UNHCR has a refugee protection hotline. Other UN agencies with helplines/hotlines are IOM, UNICEF, WHO, WFP, and there are 12 NGOs with helplines, including Caritas and TRC.

- In **Yemen**, refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs can call helplines in the different UNHCR offices. UNHCR and partners have also opened 24-hour hotlines for information and services available to lessen the impact of COVID-19, including cash support and psychosocial counselling.[59] Other UN agencies with hotlines/helplines for affected communities are IOM, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, WFP. Two NGOs, ADRA and ICRC, are offering helpline services.

2.2.3.3 Bulk SMS

SMS is one of the most efficient channels for short messages for all target groups – refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, and other affected communities. Mobile ownership and use are common in the six countries under review, and affected individuals and communities prefer SMS to digital communication, as smartphones and internet are costly and not accessible to all.

All six country operations use SMS to convey general information, information about e.g. RSD, cash and food assistance, and most recently, COVID-19. At FGDs, in participatory assessments, and in surveys, refugees and

55 Accountability dilemmas and collective approaches to communication and community engagement in Yemen (2020)

56 Data gathered by the TC research team

57 UNHCR Tunisia COVID-19 emergency preparedness and response plan (updated) (May 2020)

58 *Ibid.*

59 UNHCR Yemen Operational Update (July 2020)

asylum seekers in Algeria and Morocco have given a positive response to the use of SMS, which is appreciated as being simple to use, free of cost, and reaching everybody. In Tunisia and Yemen, bulk SMS has been expanded to provide regular updates on the COVID-19 situation.[60] In Yemen, up to 1 million SMS messages were planned to be sent to IDP and refugee families on COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures.[61]

Table 7. Bulk SMS

UNHCR Operation	Algeria	Libya	Morocco	Tunisia	Turkey	Yemen
Cash-based interventions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CBP	✓		✓	✓		
COVID-19 information	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Detention	✓					
Food assistance	✓	✓	✓	✓		
General info and awareness	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
RSD eligibility and interview dates		✓			✓	

2.3 DIGITAL TOOLS

The use of digital tools for CwC varies greatly between the UNHCR operations in the six countries. At one extreme is Turkey, where the UNHCR operation is one of the most advanced globally in terms of communication technology, and at the other Yemen and Libya, where the destruction of infrastructure and irregular supply of electricity pose serious obstacles to the use of digital communication tools. The use of digital tools in the other four country operations falls somewhere in-between these two extremes.

All country operations are striving to enhance the use of digital tools, however, many refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs do not have digital access for various reasons. Many cannot afford the costs of using smartphones and internet, others are unable to use digital tools because they do not have the required skills or are prevented by specific disabilities or vulnerabilities. In some of the countries, the political situation is putting constraints on the use of social media. Nevertheless, the importance of digital tools for communicating with affected communities is constantly growing.

60 UNHCR Tunisia COVID-19 emergency preparedness and response plan (updated) (May 2020)

61 UNHCR CwC for COVID-19 Yemen fact sheet (July 2020)

Table 8. Digital tools

UNHCR Operation	Algeria	Libya	Morocco	Tunisia	Turkey	Yemen
Websites						
UNHCR country website					✓	
Help.unhcr website	✓			✓	✓	
RSD website					✓	
APPs						
Services Advisor App					✓	
Chatbot					✓	
Social Media						
Facebook		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Instagram (mainly aimed for the general public)			✓			
Signal		✓	✓			
Viber		✓				
WhatsApp & WhatsApp trees	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Telegram					✓	
Twitter (mainly aimed for the general public)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Other						
Email for referrals		✓		✓	✓	
Virtual meetings		✓	✓	✓		

2.3.1 UNHCR DEDICATED WEBSITES

Algeria and Tunisia are the other two countries with UNHCR Help.org websites, both launched in 2020, with information in Arabic, French, and English. They give information on UNHCR's activities in Algeria and Tunisia and give addresses and contact details for both offices. Information includes how to apply for asylum, RSD, services provided, complaint procedures, as well as links to the most relevant COVID-19 information sites.

UNHCR Turkey is the only one of the six country operations with a UNHCR country website. The information is in Turkish and English. In addition to this, UNHCR Turkey has three dedicated websites, all providing different functions and features:

1. A dedicated RSD Results website was initially established in 2006. The website is designed to allow refugees and asylum seekers to access their status for resettlement and financial support, as well as to update basic information such as phone numbers, ID number, and city of residence. The website works in eight languages. Through the platform, users are also directed to relevant online resources.[62]

2. Help.unhcr Turkey website provides refugees with information on a wide range of key themes, ranging from registration to livelihoods. The platform is available in Arabic and Farsi - the two most spoken languages by refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey - and in English and Turkish. In addition to targeting refugees, the website also plays a coordination role as it guides partner organisations and other stakeholders in accurately producing messaging on technical issues.[63]

3. The Services Advisor for Turkey was launched in 2017. The Services Advisor is a web platform that enables refugees to locate available humanitarian and governmental services closest to them in a simple and user-friendly manner. The information is displayed in Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Kurdish, English and Turkish.

2.3.2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Because of restraints and obstacles, social media is not the most effective CwC tool in all the six countries under review, but its role in the humanitarian context is gradually becoming more important and new applications are being tested. For example, UNHCR is using WhatsApp trees to facilitate rapid and zero-cost information sharing with communities.

Reliance on platforms specifically targeting refugees and asylum seekers (e.g. on Facebook) has become imperative and all six country operations reference them as a tool for CwC. However, only Turkey is keeping donor-related information and information aimed at refugees apart on separate Facebook pages, while the other country operations often have pieces of information targeting different audiences on the same page. This may lead to confusion and frustration among end users. Digital platforms such as Facebook could be better utilised and garner a larger engagement if fully dedicated to a specific targeted audience along the Turkey model.

Obstacles common to all six countries are the costs related to the use of digital tools - smartphones and connectivity - costs that refugees and asylum seekers often cannot afford. In Yemen and partially also in Libya it is the destruction of infrastructure and lack of electricity and internet that makes social media less viable as a communication tool.

Several awareness-raising campaigns on social media about the dangers of irregular travels through the Sahara and across the Mediterranean have as a main target group refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants on their way to or already in Libya *(see chapter 5)*. Campaigns such as UNHCR's Telling the Real Story[64] or IOM's and the Italian Government's Aware Migrants,[65] both featuring interviews with victims of smugglers and traffickers, are being shown on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, inviting comments and feedback from the audience.

- UNHCR **Algeria** is working in a sensitive political environment which limits possibilities for using social media as a two-way communication channel with refugees and asylum seekers. Moreover, feedback from the communities indicates that most of them do not have phones supporting internet which is an additional obstacle. However, in the Tindouf camps there are WhatsApp groups supporting communication between refugees and between refugees and agencies. Moreover, to further its efforts of connecting refugees to each other, UNHCR supported the development and launch of Amnir, an app developed by young refugees allowing trade and sales between Sahrawi refugees across all five Tindouf camps.

- **Libya** is an emergency in which humanitarian organisations are using a wide array of social media platforms for CwC and where new applications are being tested. UNHCR Libya is using Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Viber and has recently started using Signal, a more secure and encrypted messaging service. UNHCR also runs WhatsApp groups for community leaders. Moreover, since the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR Libya has started using WebEx to conduct virtual community meetings. The country is also one of three where the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) in collaboration with WHO is piloting Ministry of Health chatbots to support hotlines for the COVID-19 pandemic (the others being the Central African Republic and Iraq).[66]

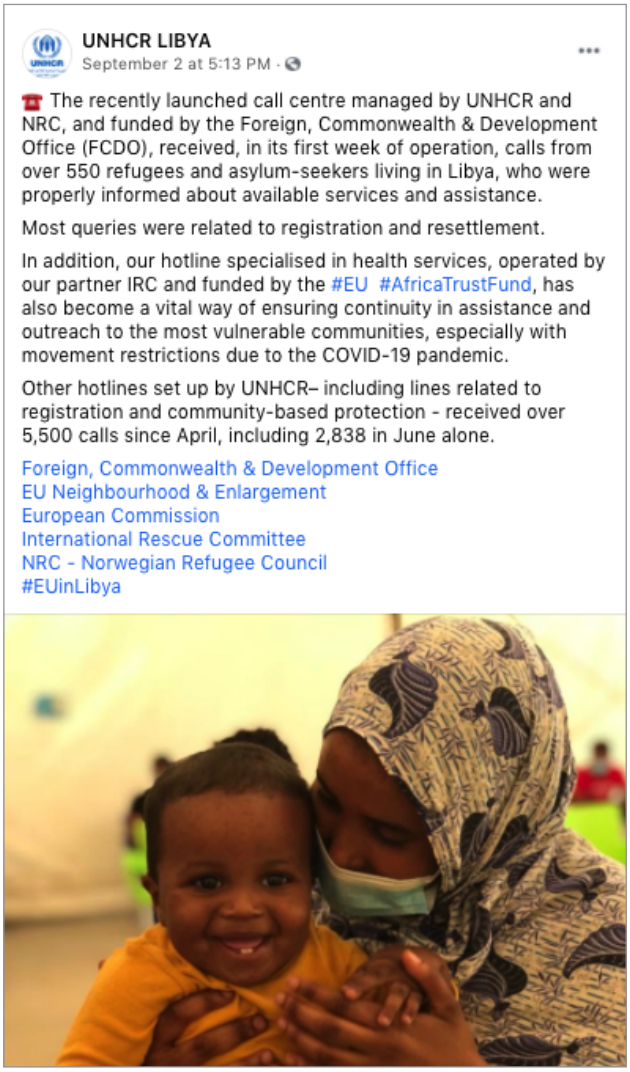
62 UNHCR Turkey CwC fact sheet (July 2019)

63 *Ibid.*

64 Telling the Real Story

65 Aware Migrants

66 Tips for Engaging Communities during COVID-19 in Low-Resource Settings, Remotely, In-Person (April 2020)



- In **Morocco**, the use of social media among refugees is more common than in neighbouring Algeria. A recent survey showed that 44% of refugee families were using social media. UNHCR Morocco is using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, as well as WhatsApp and Signal for communication with community leaders, and is working with refugees and local social media influencers.

- UNHCR **Tunisia** is using Facebook to facilitate online discussions on support and inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers, e.g. in the form of webinars with the participation of refugee representatives and Tunisian NGOs.[67] Other UN organisations such as UNICEF and WHO are also working with social media for disseminating information and messages to affected population groups in Tunisia.

- UNHCR **Turkey** is communicating with refugees on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, disseminating information, videos and other materials produced by the UNHCR CwC unit.

A dedicated Facebook page, the UNHCR Turkey Information Board provides refugees with information and news in Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, and English. It also broadcasts podcasts on a weekly basis on various issues alongside digital pamphlets covering a range of topics of relevance to PoC in Turkey. The page enables general queries via email and phone to be received and responded to, thus enhancing UNHCR's two-way communication with persons of concern.[68]

In 2020, UNHCR Turkey created a designated WhatsApp communications tree with three levels for cascading down information. Level one in Arabic and Farsi is managed by UNHCR's CwC team, level two is managed by UNHCR focal points in each of the six field units, and level three is managed through partner focal points disseminating information to existing WhatsApp groups run by refugee committees and communities or partners who can spread the key messages even further.[69]

The UNHCR Turkey CwC Team is also monitoring social media for interactions on migration and refugee-related issues by following the pages on Facebook, Telegram, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Twitter, with the highest number of followers among Arabic and Farsi-speaking communities.

- In **Yemen**, UNHCR is using Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp for communication with affected communities. Several WhatsApp groups were set up during the COVID-19 pandemic to alert displaced families on prevention measures and services available.

[67] WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2020 in Tunisia - Situations - UNHCR

[68] UNHCR Turkey CwC fact sheet (July 2019)

[69] UNHCR Turkey Operational Update (March 2020)

3 CATERING TO THE END USERS

3.1 MEETING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF END USERS IN THE COMMUNITIES

The information needs of persons of concern to UNHCR and of other community members differ depending on their life situation. Different groups have different needs. The pilot survey among refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt (see chapter 9) showed a clear disparity in the information needs of different groups.

The respondents were asked to list the most important sectors they needed information about in order of priority. All the non-vulnerable respondents put health at the top of the list. Among the vulnerable groups, older people, children, and the physically disabled also mentioned health as the most important sector. However, single mothers and the illiterate listed education as their top information need, with health in second place. GBV survivors had legal aid and general protection as their two top priorities and food assistance as number three, with health only as the fifth priority after education. Older people had food assistance as second priority and livelihoods as third. Children had education as second priority after health. All the non-vulnerable put general protection as second on their list after health, and RSD and resettlement as number three.

3.2 VULNERABLE PERSONS, PERSONS WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS, AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

> *"Persons with disabilities and illiterate people are at a disadvantage. Their main source of information is their friends, and they may have inaccurate information."*
> Somali community leader

A priority of UNHCR MENA is to implement the UNHCR AGD Policy with its special focus on accountability to affected populations. It highlights the importance of ensuring that vulnerable groups, persons with specific needs, and persons with disabilities can enjoy their rights on an equal footing with other community members. This study is looking at the information needs of community members from the same perspective: Within CwC, no-one should be left behind. The access of these groups to communication mechanisms and platforms must be secured. Much has been done over the years to improve the situation, but these groups are still facing significant challenges to access information and give feedback and response.

> *"I don't understand the information I receive because I can't read. It has to be verbal."*
> Somali refugee woman

Vulnerable groups are facing more obstacles to accessing information and two-way communication than other community members. Such obstacles can be illiteracy, physical and mental disabilities, or reduced mobility making it difficult to get to agencies' offices or helpdesks. Apart from persons with special needs and persons with disabilities, among the vulnerable are unaccompanied children, single mothers, older people, living in remote areas, and people on the move. Refugee women are generally less likely than men to have access to mobile technology and internet services. Obstacles include cost of connectivity, poor digital literacy, and complex gender norms. However, they are often better connected to the community than men and thus get information through word of mouth.

The number of persons with disabilities among the persons of concern to UNHCR in the MENA region is considerable, and under-identification of persons with a disability is a common concern. In 2018, 1.6% of UNHCR's PoC in the MENA region were registered as persons with disabilities, and if persons not registered but possibly disabled were included, the rate rose to 4.4%.

A 2019 UNHCR MENA review found limited adaptation of information tools and materials to cater to the needs of persons with disabilities. Flyers were not available in easy-read versions. Information disseminated via WhatsApp did not consistently include an audio file. Information in Braille or support for sign language was not available. In Egypt and Lebanon, UNHCR is using videos and WhatsApp messages for the illiterate and visually impaired. UNHCR Jordan has a Disabilities Task Force for developing and disseminating information materials, and thematic working groups to develop messages for GBV survivors and LGBTIQ+ persons and identify specific tools to reach them. There are dedicated child-protection and GBV hotlines in all operations. In Jordan, the Amaali mobile app was launched to assist GBV survivors in the context of the Syrian crisis.

4 QUALITATIVE STUDY: REFUGEES IN EGYPT

A pilot survey was conducted in June 2020 in Cairo with eight different communities (Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalis, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Syrians, Yemenis, Nigerians) out of the 58 nationalities residing in Egypt. The respondents included refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. People were asked how they access information, what they think of the information, and how they communicate with UNHCR, its partners, and other agencies.

The survey had 91 respondents and thus should be considered as a relatively small sample of the opinions and information needs of persons of concern to UNHCR. Approximately half were women and half men, with one person identifying as transgender. All age groups were represented, from youth under 18 to elderly over 70 years old. The largest group of vulnerable people were single mothers, followed by physically disabled persons and unaccompanied minors.

The collection of data was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic which made it difficult to conduct interviews or FGDs.

4.1 INFORMATION GAPS AND CHALLENGES

A majority of the respondents stated they felt uninformed for various reasons. As main obstacles they mentioned language barriers, poor quality of information, and difficulties accessing information. Physical distance to CBOs and organisations was also seen as a problem. Vulnerable respondents cited a lack of communication tools adapted to their needs.

A multitude of languages
There is a multitude of languages spoken among persons of concern to UNHCR in Egypt, which has refugees and asylum seekers from 58 countries. Arabic and English are the main languages used by agencies, which poses a problem for those who do not read or understand those languages. Even refugees from other Arabic-speaking countries may have difficulty understanding the Arabic dialect spoken in Egypt. Hence, those who cannot understand websites and printed materials must rely on community leaders, other community members, and often their own family members, including their children, to translate for them.

> *"Whenever I go to organisations, the posters are either in Arabic or English which I hardly understand."*
>
> Ethiopian unaccompanied minor

Uneven quality of information
Many pointed to problems in the quality of the information they receive. Half of the interviewees felt they did not receive enough information from agencies, that the level of information was too generic, and that it sometimes was difficult to understand the relevance of it. Harsh criticism was also voiced about the UNHCR helpline, which was seen as inefficient.

> *"When I call the UNHCR, if they pickup they wouldn't hear me fully or explain even though I speak their language. They sometimes hang up on me."*
>
> Ethiopian man

Some are left behind
Even when information was publicly available on websites, social media, and WhatsApp, some said they faced challenges accessing it. They did not have a mobile or an internet connection, they did not have the technological skills to access the internet, or they had disabilities preventing them from watching or listening. Survey participants with a disability stated they mostly depended on their family and other people for information.

> *"I'm an elderly person and I can't use the internet. I always need somebody who can help me get information."*
>
> South Sudanese elderly woman

➔ **Offices hard to reach**
Egypt is a big country and distances between the areas where persons of concern to UNHCR live and the offices of UNHCR and partners can be considerable. Even in Cairo, it may take hours to travel, and the cost could be too high for some community members. This is one of the reasons why the most frequent source of information was friends and other community members, and visits to agencies' offices the least frequent source.

> *"Syrians find it challenging to physically approach organisations as they live in far-away areas. They spend a lot of money and time to do so."*
>
> Syrian community leader

4.2 WHAT SOURCES ARE TRUSTED?

Persons of concern in the MENA region originate from societies with a strong oral tradition, also known as High Context Societies. For these societies, the source of the information is more significant than the message itself. Consequently, most the respondents in this study stated that their most frequently used source of information was verbal information within the community, followed by websites and social media. Less frequently used were outreach workers, helplines, printed materials, and visits to agency offices.

But the most frequently used sources are not always the most trusted ones. The respondents who said they received their information via the internet and social media often double checked the accuracy with community leaders or agencies.

Most respondents thought international organisations were the most trustworthy and that some of them could be more trusted than others. Those with a strong presence in the communities and communicating in languages understood by the community members were the most trusted. Many, including community leaders, said they always checked the accuracy of any information with an international organisation before sharing it with the community. For printed media, such as posters and brochures, the importance of logos was highlighted as a way for community members to trust the message. UNHCR was the most well-known organisation among the respondents.

In Egypt there is a considerable number of CBOs, with 112 in Cairo alone. CBOs and community leaders were seen as trusted sources of information. The survey however indicates that communities may have several leaders, some of which are not the same ones that UNHCR recognises as contact persons. This shows how important it is to determine who is a community leader, especially when they play such an important role as an information channel for the communities.

> *"If I need information, I send one of my children to the community centre or I contact the community leaders, they get their information from NGOs."*
>
> South Sudanese woman

4.3 WHICH TOOLS ARE PREFERRED?

Most respondents preferred face-to-face communication with outreach workers. They felt the information given this way was easier to understand and gave them a chance to ask questions on the spot, opening up for two-way communication. The second most popular tool for communication was social media, especially the Facebook pages of organisations and those of community groups. Printouts (leaflets, booklets) and helplines were not seen as that important. In many cases, community leaders and CBOs must explain or translate the information, if PoC cannot read or do not understand Arabic or English. Very few said they preferred communication through other means, such as websites and SMS.

4.4 WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION IS MOST LOOKED FOR?

The kind of information interviewees mentioned looking for most often were health, protection, education, and RSD. Health was mentioned by all interviewees as an important issue and topped the list for older persons and people with disabilities.

1. Protection was especially important for women and girls but mentioned by all groups.
2. Education was also important for women and girls and for children.
3. RSD was mentioned as important across all groups.
4. Food assistance and livelihood was asked for mainly by older persons and the vulnerable

Table 9. Type of information searched for by nationality*

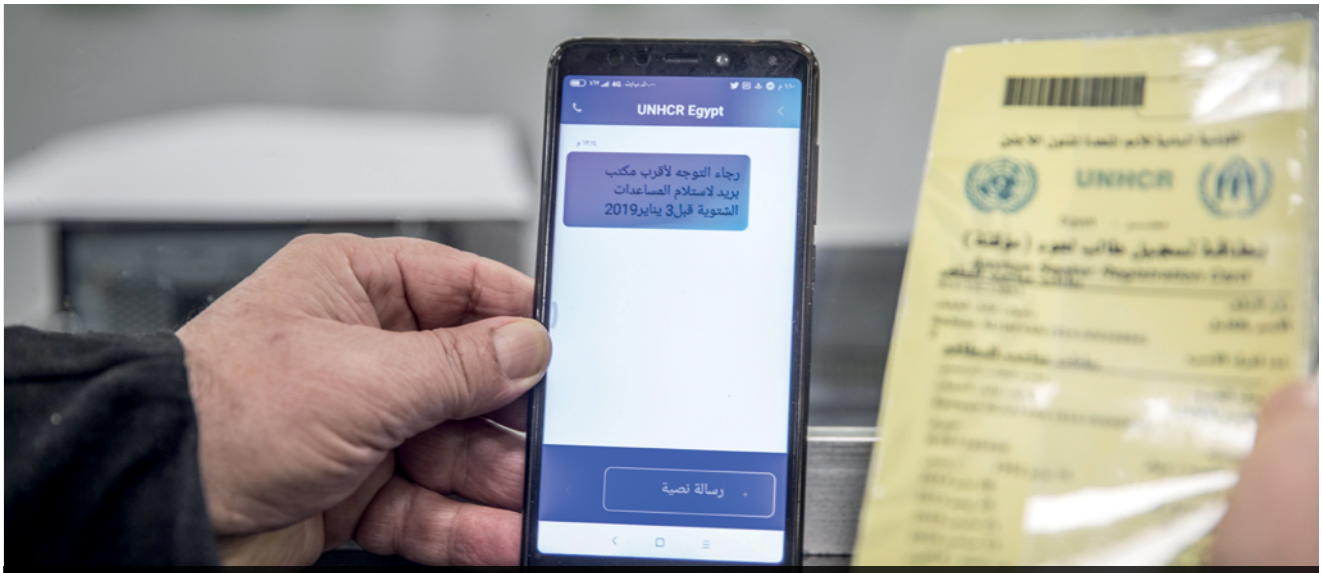
Services searched for by nationality in order of priority: (1 = most searched for)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Eritrean	Education	RSD/RST	Protection	Health
Ethiopian	Health	RSD/RST	Protection	Education
Nigerian	Health	Protection	Education	RSD/RST
Somali	Livelihoods	Health	Education	Protection
South Sudanese	Food assistance	Protection	Health	Education
Sudanese	Health	RSD/RST	Protection	Education
Syrian	Health	Food assistance	Protection	Education

*Source: Qualitative study: Refugees in Egypt

Table 10. Type of information searched for by vulnerable group*

Services searched for by vulnerable groups in order of priority: (1 = most searched for)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Women and girls	Education	Health	Protection	RSD/RST
Persons with disabilities	Health	Food assistance	Livelihoods	RSD/RST
GBV survivors	Legal aid	Livelihoods	Residence	Protection
Older persons	Health	Food assistance	Livelihoods	Financial aid

*Source: Qualitative study: Refugees in Egypt



A Syrian refugee collects UNHCR's Winter Cash Assistance after receiving an SMS notification, at the Post Office of Egypt in 6th of October City, Cairo, Egypt © UNHCR/ Pedro Costa Gomes

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