



*Hanan, a mother of 5 from the town of Al-Ashara in rural Deir-ez-Zor, inside her workshop in her house. Hanan heard about the start-up business grants provided by a UNHCR-supported community centre in Al-Ashara. Upon approaching the centre, Hanan received a complete sewing kit: a sewing machine, a table, lighting, a stand, a hammer, threads.
Photo: © UNHCR/Vivian Tou'meh*

IMPACT OF FUNDING CUTS ON OPERATIONS IN THE MENA REGION

Overview

In 2023, UNHCR's income decreased globally by nearly \$1 billion despite having to respond to emergencies in over two dozen countries and persistent growth in the number of the forcibly displaced people worldwide. As a result, UNHCR was compelled to make difficult budgeting decisions that negatively impacted the lives of many refugees.

Despite generous support from many donors, the funding forecast for 2024 indicates that the Office is facing further shortfalls; as of end-April, operations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have received \$256.4 million out of \$2,341 million required (11%).

UNHCR has been obliged to **significantly reduce its planned expenditures** in four countries – namely

Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria), and Yemen – by \$93 million in total so far.

The Office is doing its utmost to minimize the impact of reductions on those in need. We continue to look for ways to be more efficient globally and advocate urgently for more funding.

Nevertheless, budget cuts will expose the forcibly displaced and their host communities in the concerned countries to additional vulnerabilities, higher levels of poverty, and increased protection risks. Protection space is tangibly shrinking, onward movements increasing, including irregular and dangerous departures by sea, all while the underlying geopolitical dynamics in several parts of MENA remain unresolved, with far-reaching effects on regional peace and stability.

IMPACT OF REDUCTIONS IN COUNTRY OPERATIONS

LEBANON

- Reductions in institutional support projects will hinder refugees' access to timely civil registration and legal residency, posing severe protection risks.

\$27.8 million reduction for 2024 programming so far

As of 8 May, UNHCR Lebanon is **16% funded** against total 2024 requirements of **\$545.2 million**

- 115,000 refugee families will lose cash assistance from the joint UNHCR/WFP cash programme, which is the lifeline for the most severely vulnerable refugee families in the country, representing a drop of over 40% from 2023, even as more refugees in Lebanon fall below the poverty line. UNHCR has already been obliged to discontinue winter cash programmes, further exacerbating financial strains during colder months.
- Healthcare coverage has been reduced and refugees must now cover up to 40% of their hospital bills, leading to fewer refugees accessing proper care and the postponement of medical treatments.
- UNHCR Lebanon's capacity to restock emergency supplies will be curtailed, impeding its ability to respond quickly and effectively to emergent crises.

JORDAN

- As of April, the number of refugee families receiving UNHCR's basic needs cash assistance in urban areas, where 82% of refugees reside, was decreased by nearly one-third, from 30,000 to 23,500. In addition, beginning in May the amount of cash assistance will be reduced by 25%.

\$28 million reduction for 2024 programming so far

As of 8 May, UNHCR Jordan is **16% funded** against total 2024 requirements of **\$374.8 million**

Together, these cuts exacerbate the already dire situation for refugees: a staggering 70% of Syrian refugees endure sub-standard living conditions, lacking proper lighting, ventilation, and secure infrastructure. Nearly all refugee households are burdened with debt, with 89% in urban areas resorting to negative coping strategies such as child begging to survive.

- Programmes to maintain and repair shelters in the camps will be drastically reduced, impacting the lives of refugees.
- UNHCR will also have to cut back protection services, including to survivors of gender-based violence as well as transportation of ill refugees from camps to hospitals outside.



Syrian refugees endure cold winter in Zaatari camp, Jordan. Photo: © UNHCR/ Claire Thomas

SYRIA

- Syria is wavering on the edge of a severe humanitarian crisis driven by armed conflict, economic collapse, disease outbreaks, earthquakes and dwindling public services. Inadequate funding will result in hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people going without aid, heightening protection risks, undermining social cohesion, and driving more people to leave the country. This will have a detrimental impact on the communities and families who have managed, with modest help from the international community and, despite the enormous challenges, to remain in the country.
- UNHCR has reduced its 2024 budget and activities by 20% despite the increasing humanitarian needs in the country. This has resulted in a reduction of field staff and core activities such as shelter, relief items, cash assistance, community support, and livelihood assistance.
- Due to the budget reduction, over 225,000 people will not receive protection services, nearly 60,000 will lack shelter assistance, 130,000 will not receive relief items, over 47,000 will go without cash assistance, and about 10,000 will not benefit from livelihood and economic support.

\$19.4 million reduction for 2024 programming so far

As of 8 May, UNHCR Syria is **10% funded** against total 2024 requirements of **\$466.6 million**

YEMEN

- The significant protection and displacement challenges in Yemen rank it among the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The situation is marked by civilian casualties, widespread and prolonged displacement, and socio-economic marginalization.
- There are currently 4.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 71,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Yemen. In 2023, climate-related displacement surged to a four-year high, accounting for 76% of the newly displaced, while the remaining 24% were due to conflict.
- In 2024, UNHCR Yemen is reducing its cash assistance programming by 25%, which will affect 20,000 households (140,000 individuals) reliant on life-saving multi-purpose cash assistance. In addition, vulnerable internally displaced families, including those in cold mountain areas, will go without winterization support like blankets and winter clothing.
- Diminished resources will compromise UNHCR's life-saving protection efforts for 16.4 million people in Yemen including refugees, asylum-seekers, and IDPs. UNHCR has had to reduce the geographic reach of crucial services such as community-based protection monitoring, psychosocial support, and legal assistance.

\$18.2 million reduction for 2024 programming so far

As of 8 May, UNHCR Yemen is **11% funded** against total 2024 requirements of **\$354.4 million**



The conditions at internally displaced people sites in Yemen are dire.
 Photo: © UNHCR/Gregory Doane

- Scaling back UNHCR's shelter programmes means some 66,000 IDPs will continue to live in sub-optimal conditions. Livelihood support, initiatives to support spontaneous voluntary return, and integration activities will also be impacted, placing further strain on the socio-economic well-being of both refugees and IDPs in Yemen.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

Onward movements increase: The region has seen a notable increase in people undertaking onward journeys, encompassing individuals fleeing conflict, persecution, poverty, governance issues, or the repercussions of climate change. Regardless of the triggers of movement, people face serious protection risks including exploitation, abuse and human trafficking as they navigate these routes.

Over the first four months of 2024, [more than 40,000 people arrived by sea](#) in Italy, Greece, Spain, Cyprus and Malta **from countries in the MENA region and Türkiye**. Funding shortfalls compromise UNHCR's ability to provide international protection and find solutions for forcibly displaced people while upholding their rights. This obstructs efforts to create legal pathways for labour mobility and refugee integration into local economies. Lack of resources also severely limits support for the safe and dignified return to the country of origin for those without protection or legal migration options. Failing to address these protection challenges is likely to prompt more refugees to attempt perilous onward journeys. Sustainable responses extending beyond protection and humanitarian aid are necessary to improve refugees' dignity and quality of life.

Weakened social stability and inclusion: The MENA region contends with persistent economic, political, and security challenges along with the pressing needs of IDPs, refugees, and returnees. These vulnerable groups rely on UNHCR's assistance to enhance their self-reliance and integration into national social protection programmes, which are pivotal in preserving social stability and cohesion within communities. However, funding cuts will affect how UNHCR supports national systems, potentially overwhelming them and exacerbating refugee and host community vulnerabilities. Coexistence between displaced populations and host communities may be further strained with growing anti-refugee rhetoric leading to heightened social tensions and instability.

Shrinking humanitarian space: UNHCR is deeply concerned about the broader societal impact of reductions in programming, including shrinking civic and humanitarian space. Anti-refugee sentiment has surged in Lebanon, accompanied by hate speech, orchestrated attacks, threats and intimidation, and calls for the expulsion of Syrians. Misinformation inciting fear and hatred and the potential resurgence of localized hostilities pose significant destabilization risks for the region and the broader international community.

Statelessness risk rise: Approximately 90% of forcibly displaced and stateless individuals worldwide are hosted by poorer and lower-middle-income countries. There are more than 400,000 stateless people in the MENA region, with many more communities affected by or at risk of statelessness. In certain countries, UNHCR is the sole agency providing political and humanitarian benefits that states cannot realize alone. Neglecting to register a refugee child's birth can significantly increase the risk of statelessness, with lifelong consequences. Timely registration of vital life events such as births, deaths, and marriages is crucial in averting complex challenges and progressing towards durable solutions.

Financial requirements

In 2024, UNHCR has appealed for **\$2.342 billion** to provide assistance to some 16 million forcibly displaced and stateless people across 19 operations in the Middle East and North Africa.

Donors

UNHCR is grateful for the support of donors who contributed to its operations in the MENA region with unearmarked and earmarked funds, including private donors:



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