

Syria and Iraq situations

May 2018

There are over **14 million** Syrian and Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in the Middle East and North Africa region. Understanding the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of this population is vital to ensuring they can receive the protection and assistance support they need, and ultimately, facilitate durable solutions.

UNHCR's approach to community outreach is based on a community-based protection (CBP) framework. This means that crisis-affected communities and the humanitarian actors who assist them jointly identify a community's most serious protection risks, explore their causes and effects, and jointly agree how to prevent and respond to them. CBP has been shown to achieve better protection impact and improves the lives of individuals and communities of concern.

UNHCR and partners implement multiple outreach approaches in the region, combining a wide range of physical and virtual tools to reach persons of concern and hear from them directly. Through these tools, UNHCR is able to reach hundreds of thousands of people per month, and millions per year, and ensure they get the information, support and guidance they need. These tools complement the already existing counselling sessions at the UNHCR offices.

TYPES OF OUTREACH



COMMUNITY OUTREACH IN NUMBERS



3.3 million Persons of concern in urban areas reached through various community sessions and awareness campaigns in 2017.



3,574 outreach volunteers in the region are currently supporting UNHCR and partners.



430,000 women, girls, boys and men managed to have knowledge of, access to, and benefit from empowerment opportunities in 2017.



374 community service centres are currently operational across the region serving nearly one million people.



1.4 million People engaged in or benefited through involvement, participation, or community-led initiatives in 2017.



>200,000 calls monthly to infoline or hotlines across the region.

PHYSICAL REACH OUT METHODS

Targeted visits: This includes home visits, meeting with community members or organizations or the deployment of mobile help desks. Such visits specifically target persons with specific needs, such as girls and boys at risk, including unaccompanied and separated children, persons with serious health conditions, and persons with special legal or physical protection needs, single women, women-headed households, older persons, persons with disabilities. Meeting with families one-on-one makes it easier to assess risks and determine the protection and other support required. Furthermore, vulnerability assessment for humanitarian assistance, including cash-based intervention in the region is primarily done through home visits.

- In 2017, over **114,000 IDP and refugee families** were assessed through home visits by UNHCR and partners in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon.
- In Egypt, **81 outreach meetings** were organized with over **1,600 community leaders and social workers** from different nationalities, including those living in remote locations.
- In Iraq, with a view to enhance two-way communication, access to feedback and complaint mechanism the pop-up desk concept was piloted in 2017. This helped to disseminate information to over **4,000 refugees and IDPs**, while **729** of them received specific feedback about the services provided by UNHCR and partners.
- In Lebanon, UNHCR and partners conducted **1,102 monitoring visits** in detention facilities where **5,701 refugees** were provided psychosocial counseling, legal support, core relief items and medical attention.

Outreach volunteers: The network of dedicated community members, often known as “outreach volunteers”, support UNHCR in passing on information on services, including legal assistance, raising awareness and providing feedback on community risks and concerns, as well as in identifying and referring IDPs and refugees who are in need of protection support to specialized services. The volunteers, primarily IDPs and refugees and in some instances host community members, receive training from UNHCR and partners to enhance their capacities, starting from themselves.

- Some **3,574 outreach volunteers** in the region are currently supporting UNHCR and partners.
- In 2017, over **260,000 individuals/families** in heightened risks situation were identified and referred for specific protection and other services across the region, primarily through this method.



Syrian refugee Refei, centre, and his wife Kafa, right, speak with UNHCR staff at the family's rented home in Karak, Karak Governorate, Jordan. Refei's wife Kafa received a one off cash assistance for health from UNHCR to cover the cost of an emergency appendectomy and hospital stay.
 © UNHCR/David Azia

Community spaces and centres: UNHCR runs community centres which serve as an integral “one stop shop” providing a wide range of integrated services and programmes. It also serves as an important venue for community to engage on their own issues, to identify protection concerns and to develop community-led initiatives. This can include legal aid, education and livelihoods training, start-up grants, primary health care, psychosocial support, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention and response activities, child friendly space, and help to people with special needs.

- Some **374 community service centres** are operational across the region serving nearly one million people.
- In Syria, there are currently **94 community centres, 17 satellite centres,** and **74 mobile units** operating across 12 governorates.



The Wadi Jamous Community Development Centre in Lebanon, established with the support of UNHCR, aims to enhance interaction between Syrian refugees and host communities. © UNHCR/Jordi Matas

Community-led entities and structures: UNHCR support various IDP or refugee-led community entities and structures which can range from community-established informal entities or groups or more formal structures. These entities and structures are important for disseminating information, protection monitoring and conducting community activities.

- In Jordan, **25 Community Support Committees (CSCs)** in various urban locations play a significant role in addressing protection needs, disseminating information, taking community initiatives and supporting social cohesion in various urban locations.
- In 2017, UNHCR collaborated with **147 informal community entities** and structures in Lebanon for dissemination of information, addressing specific protection needs, and organizing social activities.
- In Turkey, urban women and youth committees in Gaziantep and other provinces remain key community-based structures. In addition, UNHCR collaborates with municipalities, such as Kecioren Municipality in Ankara, to disseminate information and provide counseling to refugees. It has also established a refugee council to promote social cohesion between refugee and host communities. Municipalities within Istanbul run dedicated help desks to disseminate information to refugees and facilitate referrals (for health, psychosocial, legal, education etc.).

Community-led initiatives: UNHCR also supports community-led initiatives which can empower members of the community, rebuild solidarity and improve social cohesion between displaced and host communities. Support can entail financial, technical or in-kind across a range of focus areas, including education, health, child protection and SGBV. It also promotes two-way communication between service providers and communities.

- In 2017, over **2,200 community-led initiatives** were supported by UNHCR across the region benefitting nearly 534,000 individuals. For example, in Jordan a girl's group of Syrian adolescents and youth in Zaatari camp has taken initiative to raise awareness against early marriage and campaign for girl's education.
- On average, **35 per cent** of such initiatives are **led by adolescents** and youth, **25 per cent by women**, and eight per cent by older persons.
- In 2017, UNHCR conducted **16 Grassroots Theatre Initiatives (GTI)** in Iraq, which included theatre performances (on access to services such as education and health) by actors selected from the IDP and host communities, and organized **161 community level conflict resolution sessions**, reaching over **8,000 people**.
- The ratio of participation refugees/host community was 10:4 at some initiatives, such as the Solidarity Initiative in Lebanon where **98 projects** were implemented country-wide in 2017.

VIRTUAL REACH OUT METHODS

Infolines, hotlines or call centres: These means are mainly used to provide counselling and information on protection and assistance including available services to individuals who may otherwise face difficulties in approaching UNHCR directly. These services are often available in multiple languages in each country to ensure refugees receive the precise help that they need.

- In Lebanon, UNHCR has a hotline in each field office answering to some **8,000 calls per week**, in addition to a joint call centre with WFP that provide responses to cash and food queries and takes emergency protection and health related issues. Up to **50 operators** respond to **160,000 calls** per month (**8,000 per day in high peaks**). As of 1 July, UNICEF will also join the call centre.
- UNHCR Jordan has one of the largest refugee helplines in the world, answering nearly **150,000 calls per month**, including for legal advice and consultations through an automated-voice response system. The Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology was introduced in December 2017 to increase the number of calls handled by the helpline team, with over **500 pre-recorded and tailored voice messages** to fit most caller's question. Emergency or complicated calls, such as detention or protection issues, are immediately transferred to staff.
- In Egypt, the infoline service respond to an average of 760 calls daily in seven languages.



UNHCR Egypt has established the Infoline service since July 2015 and answers an average of 760 calls daily in seven languages (English, Arabic, French, Oromo, Amharic, Tigrinya, and Somali). © UNHCR/Scott Nelson

WhatsApp group and SMS: WhatsApp is a communication tool that facilitates rapid and low cost two-way communication between humanitarian workers and refugees while SMS is used to disseminate vital messages instantly in bulk. Such virtual communication tools are used for multiple purposes, such as to inform people about their entitlements or to immediately react to rumors that could have a destabilizing impact on refugee families.

- In Jordan, nearly **six million SMS messages** were sent in 2017 with specific messages on distributions, cash assistance and other crucial information either to entire refugee population or targeting the specific profiles.
- In Lebanon, some **8,000 refugees and partner's** communication focal points are connected through UNHCR WhatsApp communication tree. The information sent on WhatsApp escalate down to some **60,000 families**.

Facebook and other social media platforms: Refugees are increasingly using social media platforms for the information they need which means that UNHCR needs to be active on the same platforms. Across the region, each UNHCR operation has a social media presence, such as on Facebook and Twitter, which enables refugees to get information they need and can trust while using their preferred social media platforms.

- In Egypt, the UNHCR Facebook page has over **87,000 followers**. Some of the pages are in English and Arabic, aimed at reaching refugees with targeted messaging, often in their native languages.
- In Jordan, UNHCR's social media platforms, with **60,000 followers on Facebook** and **14,000 on Twitter** have been used to disseminate information.
- In Lebanon, outreach volunteers, some of whom are refugees, manage four Facebook close groups that are being followed by **160,000 followers**.

Dedicated websites: Alongside social media platforms, UNHCR and partners have also established dedicated websites to provide information to persons of concern on their rights and the assistance available to them. These platforms has increasingly taken the form of mobile phone Apps, which can be used by refugees on the go and provide rapid access to all types of information.

- In Lebanon, UNHCR manages the <https://ialebanon.unhcr.org/> with the support of the inter-agency coordination efforts which serve as a valuable reachout tool.
- Since the launch of the 'Help' website <http://help.unhcr.org/turkey/> for Turkey in August 2017 the site has had around **165,000 unique hits**.
- In Turkey, the 'Services Advisor' platform provides an inter-active and user-friendly web application which provides refugees with up-to-date information on available services and helps them locate the services on a map. The website is available **in six languages** Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish, Pashto as well as Turkish and English.

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UNHCR is grateful to the donors who have contributed to the assistance programme for the Syrian and Iraqi IDPs and refugees with unearmarked and earmarked funds as well as those who have contributed directly to the operations.

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Contacts

For more details, please contact UNHCR MENA Director's Office in Amman (Jordan) at: jorrherds@unhcr.org