

MENA Civil Society Network for Displacement
North Africa Sub-Regional Consultation
20 and 21 July 2016 - Tunisia

I. Setting the Tone: North Africa and its Civil Society

The Middle East and North Africa region has seen a dramatic increase in displacement over the past years, coupled with striking changes in social, economic, security and political dynamics. Recent crises such as the Syria, Iraq, Yemen or Libya conflicts, have had concrete ramifications on States, host communities, and refugees themselves.

North Africa in particular, stands at a geographical cross-roads, receiving refugees on one hand, and also facing the challenges of being a transit region for mixed migration flows. In 2016, more than 80,000 refugees and migrants arrived by sea to Italy, departing from North Africa.

North Africa provides a positive example of the crucial role that civil society plays when responding to new displacement dynamics, and as a catalyst for social, economic and political development. Despite the challenging operating environment, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), philanthropic groups, activists, faith-based organizations, media personalities, academics, and others have stepped in to play a leading role to advocate for, or provide essential services to, persons of concern to UNHCR in North Africa.

The purpose of the Civil Society Network for Displacement (“MENA CSND”) North Africa Sub-Regional consultation (“Sub-Regional Consultation”) was to strengthen partnerships between civil society actors across North Africa, and lay the foundation for a growing and continued partnership. The MENA CSND will provide a platform for interested civil society stakeholders in MENA to strengthen and amplify their individual voices and actions in favour of the protection and assistance of displaced persons through aligned messaging, joint advocacy, training and development, and stronger coordination on the ground.

Participants in the Sub-Regional Consultation included civil society representation from Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Libya and Tunisia, ranging from practicing lawyers, local NGOs, foundations, national networks, national associations, news outlets and global and regional network representations (participants list and profile analysis is attached as Annex 2 and 4).

II. Working together: Common Challenges and Opportunities

Despite country concrete operational landscapes, North African civil society face common challenges and opportunities when working on displacement issues. The MENA CSND aims at building on these opportunities both at a country and regional level.

Identified Challenges:

- **Addressing mixed migratory movements: increased detention, border management, refoulement**
- **Lack of legal frameworks at national and regional level**
- **Access to services (education, health, etc.) and social inclusion**
- **Access to registration and documentation**
- **Discrimination and xenophobia**
- **Knowing the population of concern – Enhancing refugee empowerment**
- **Human trafficking and exploitation**

Identified Opportunities:

- Increased attention on displacement and refugee matters
- Increased opportunities for expanded partnerships: judiciary, parliamentary bodies, lawyers and other professionals, youth associations, think tanks, academia, media, private sector, regional organizations, among others.
- Existing networks at national and regional levels
- Expanded inter-regional linkages
- Enhanced advocacy at national and regional levels
- Increased opportunities for funding
- Enhanced capacity building, cross-fertilization

III. Deepening Thematic Approaches: Regional Thematic Commonalities

Building National Legal Frameworks: North Africa countries are currently in the process of developing national legal frameworks on asylum and migration. However, legislative drafts are not shared with civil society organizations. Enhanced joint advocacy for both the development of national legal frameworks and accession to international legal instruments is needed. The MENA CSND could potentially reinforce current efforts, with enhanced advocacy, capacity building, and common messaging.

Creating a positive public attitude towards refugees and an inclusive society: Despite traditional solidarity towards refugees, xenophobic and discriminatory stances towards refugees also exist across North Africa. Common messaging and actions targeting different audiences, and sensitization through national and regional campaigns could foster more positive public opinion towards refugees. Further understanding of the challenges facing refugees and hosting communities is needed, with stronger participation of refugees and host communities themselves.

Strengthening access to services for refugees: Services provided to refugees across North African countries include education, legal support, health or economic support. Given this alignment, countries in the region would benefit from an exchange of good practices, cross-fertilization, joint country visits and regional exchanges, or common messaging on access to services.

IV. Enhancing Opportunities: Tools for Enhanced Cooperation

The MENA CSND can provide cross-fertilization opportunities with a view to strengthening the individual capacities of its members. The following initiatives can be considered:

- Exchange of best practices (e.g. through visits from one field location or organization to another)
- Joint training and capacity building (e.g. through workshops or expert missions)
- Common messaging and amplified voices (e.g. joint campaigns on common themes, such as Syrian refugee presence)
- Information sharing (e.g. virtual platforms or portals, regular meetings)

V. Sharing common principles: Vision, Mission and Pillars

A proposed vision, mission and values for the MENA CSND were shared with participants, with a view to building a common understanding of the network's founding principles. The following were proposed for initial consideration:

Network vision

The MENA CSND envisages a region where tolerance and solidarity guide displacement policies and where forcibly displaced persons enjoy the human rights enshrined in international human rights instruments.

Network mission

The MENA CSND is a global network of civil society actors working together to widen protection space for displaced persons and to more effectively deliver humanitarian assistance and protection to persons of concern and their hosting communities.

Values

Tolerance, inclusion, diversity and solidarity.

VI. Building the MENA CSND in North Africa: Parameters for the future

As the MENA CSND progressively evolves, participants recommended that at an initial stage, the network focuses on results, functioning in a phased approach to adapt to the reality on the ground before addressing broader issues, such as the following:

- **Objectives:** The MENA CSND should aim at establishing common objectives and agenda, which would be linked to the overall focus of its members while still going beyond individual interests. A collective logic would allow for regional advocacy messaging, reinforcing national efforts and filling the gaps when certain interventions cannot be made at national level.
- **Structure:** The structure will influence and define decision-making and interaction among its members. It should therefore adapt to the objectives and mission of the network. It is suggested that the structure is transparent and gender-balanced to allow for credibility, responsibility and diversity.
- **Governance:** The MENA CSND should aim at balancing formal and informal, individual and collective interests, professionalism and personalization, upholding the network's diversity while working on common objectives, as well as dialogue and action. Empowerment and engagement of the MENA CSND members was stressed as essential.
- **Representation:** Considering that the network's messaging will be the result of collective efforts, consensus and compromise will be key, within the framework of the network's vision and mission. Members would need to agree on a representation mechanism to agree on and commit to joint activities.
- **Tools:** The level of expertise and coordination on displacement issues across civil society organizations in North Africa is currently inconsistent. Tools should therefore be adapted to best fit needs. It is recommended to strengthen capacity building to assist in harmonizing knowledge and tools across civil society organizations in North Africa.
- **Resources:** Depending on the structure adopted and activities to be carried out, members may choose to share resources or allocate resources or expertise to the MENA CSND for an unlimited or limited period of time. Additional resources may be brought into the network, through fundraising, recruitment of allocated staff to the network, etc.

VII. Way Forward: National and Regional Tracks

At country level:

Country focal points will be identified with an initial convening role. Follow-up meetings at country level will take place before the end of August 2016, with a view to consolidating initial thoughts on a national plan of action, defining the thematic focus of interventions and expanding membership at

national level. UNHCR will support further discussions at national level towards the reinforcement or the creation of national coordination mechanisms and implementation of the national plan of action.

At sub-regional level:

It was proposed that a North Africa sub-regional follow-up meeting is organized before the end of the year, building on on-going national and sub-regional coordination efforts. The Middle East and Gulf sub-regional consultations will take place between September and November 2016, with a view to harmonizing processes and consolidating the MENA CSND at a regional level.

At regional level:

A regional meeting will be before January 2017 aiming at establishing the regional parameters and structure for the network. Specific support in terms of resources might be warranted.

Annexes:

- Annex 1: Schematic summary of discussions and way forward
- Annex 2: Participant's profiles by thematic area of engagement
- Annex 3: Proposed timeline
- Annex 4: Full participant list

Policy Unit
Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa
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Annex 1: Schematic summary of discussions and way forward

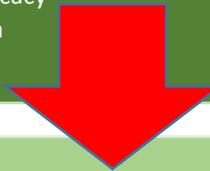
Common Challenges and Opportunities across North Africa:

Challenges:

- Addressing mixed migratory movements: increased detention, border management, refoulement
- Lack of legal frameworks at national and regional level
- Access to services (education, health, etc.) and social inclusion
- Access to registration and documentation
- Discrimination and xenophobia
- Knowing the population of concern – Enhancing refugee empowerment
- Human trafficking and exploitation

Opportunities:

- Increased attention on displacement and refugee matters
- Increased opportunities for expanded partnerships: judiciary, parliamentary bodies, lawyers and other professionals, youth associations, think tanks, academia, media, private sector, regional organizations, among others.
- Existing networks at national and regional levels
- Expanded inter-regional linkages
- Increased opportunities for funding and advocacy
- Enhanced capacity building, cross-fertilization



Sharing common principles

- **Vision:** The Network envisages a region where tolerance and solidarity guide displacement policies and where forcibly displaced persons enjoy the human rights enshrined in international human rights instruments
- **Network mission:** The MENA Civil Society Displacement Network is a global network of civil society actors working together to widen protection space for displaced persons and to more effectively deliver humanitarian assistance and protection to persons of concern and their hosting communities.
- **Values:** Hospitality, tolerance, inclusion, diversity and solidarity.



Issues for consideration

Objectives: Common objectives and agenda linked to the overall focus of its members while going beyond individual interests.

Structure: Transparent and gender-balanced for credibility, responsibility and diversity.

Governance: Balancing formal and informal, individual and collective interests, professionalism and personalization, as well as dialogue and action. Empowerment and engagement of members is essential.

Representation: Consensus and compromise will be key. Need to agree on a representation mechanism.

Tools: Strengthen capacity building across North Africa.

Next steps regional

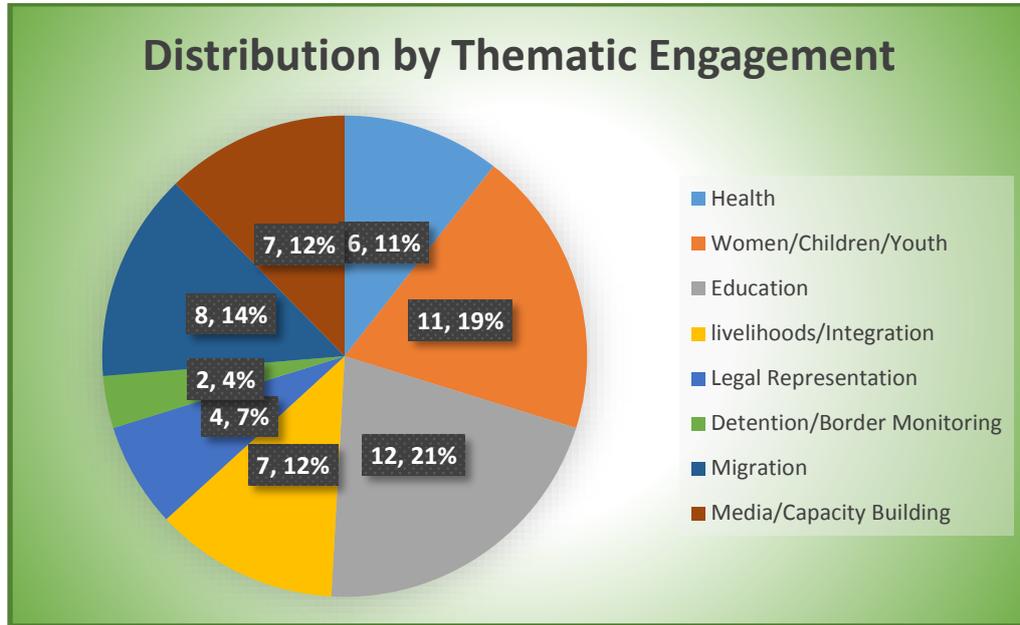
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A regional meeting will be before January 2017 aiming at establishing the regional parameters and structure for the network. Specific support in terms of resources might be warranted.

Next steps national

- Country focal points will be identified with an initial convening role.
- Follow-up meetings at country level will take place before the end of August 2016, with a view to consolidating initial thoughts on a national plan of action, defining the thematic focus of interventions and expanding membership at national level.
- UNHCR will support further discussions at national level towards the reinforcement or the creation of national coordination mechanisms and implementation of the national plan of action.

Annex 2: Participant's profiles by thematic area of engagement



Annex 3: Proposed timeline

