

NRC Middle East Mid-Year Newsletter

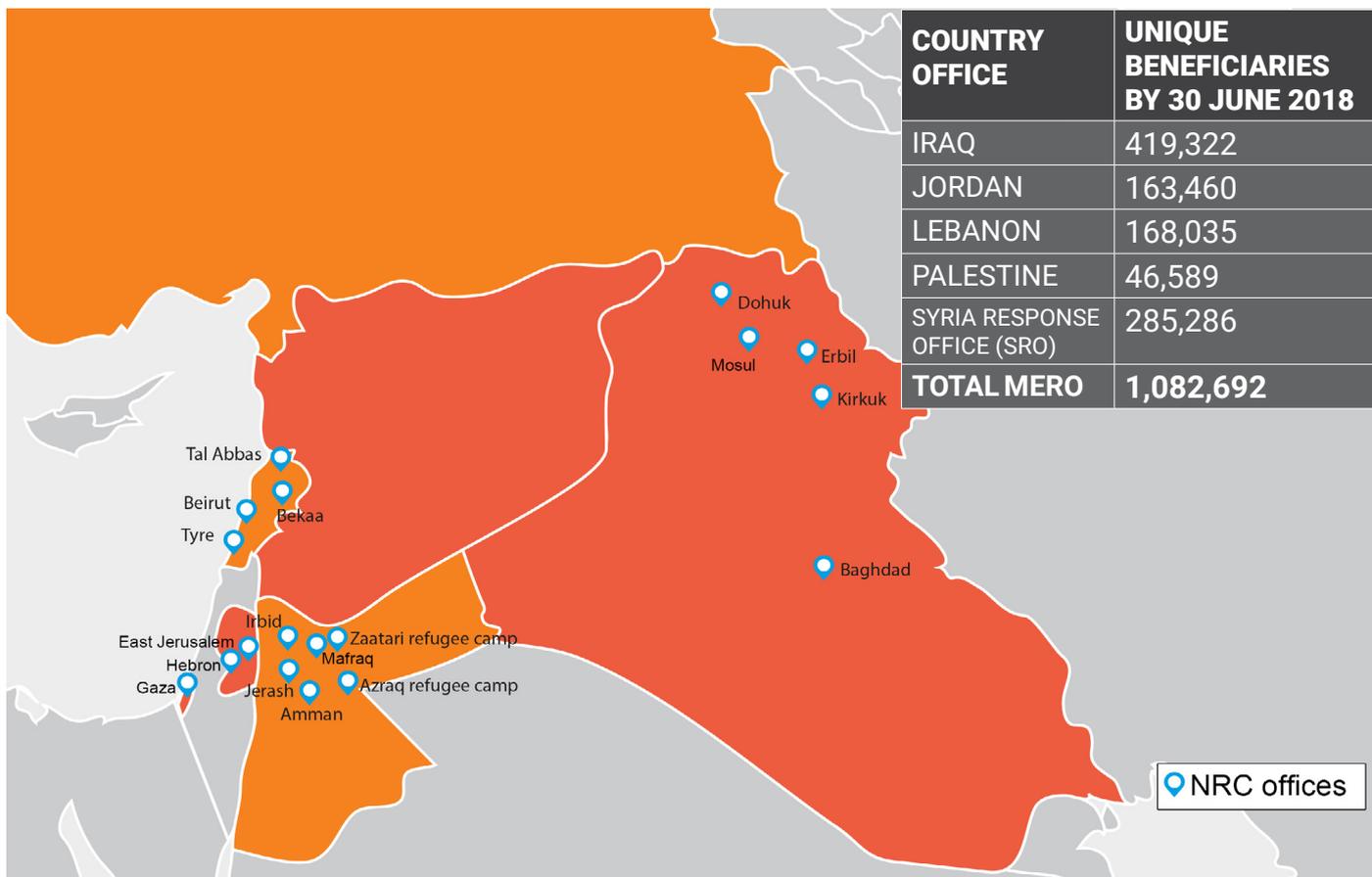
January - June 2018



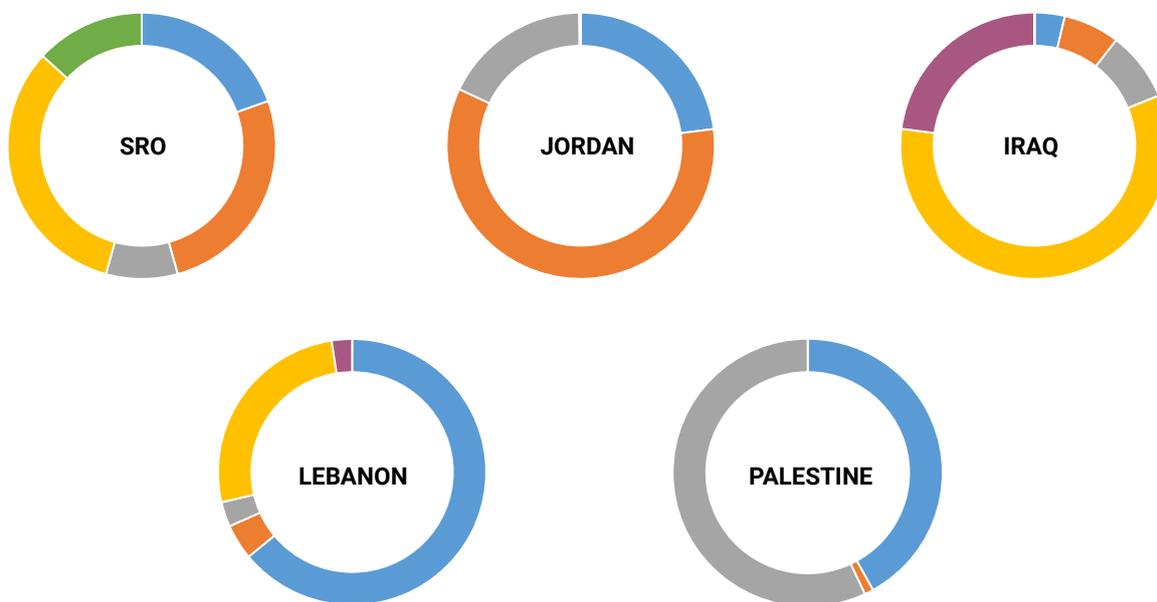
Children playing outside a tented school in Bar Elias in Lebanon's Bekaa valley, where NRC provides non-formal education to Syrian refugees that aims to integrate them into Lebanese public schools.

Photo: Elias Abu Ata/NRC

UNIQUE BENEFICIARIES BY COUNTRY:



BENEFICIARIES BY CC:



Iraq held Parliamentary elections in May 2018, which saw anti-Iranian Shia cleric Muqtada Sadr's party Sa'irun take the lead in most governorates. The incumbent PM Haidar Al-Abadi lost significant ground in Shia-dominant governorates. Since the election, the results have been mired by allegations of corruption and voter fraud, which has created uncertainty of who will take the Prime Minister's seat after the formation of a new government. A decision was since made to recount votes, further delaying the finalization of results. In the meantime, there are fears that remnants of extremist groups may re-emerge, taking advantage of the security vacuum and uncertainty of the current caretaker government.

Following collective advocacy efforts, the rate of forced returns in areas like Anbar have reduced, however the denial and reduction of basic services is a tactic increasingly used to coerce IDPs to return home, even post-Parliamentary elections. Earlier this year the Ministry of Education in Baghdad announced that a number of schools for IDPs in camps in the KRI would be closing—without specifying which ones. This was paired with the enactment of several governorate-level directives announcing that teachers would not receive salaries unless they returned to their areas of origin.

Return movements to areas of origin have continued in July, but the scale remains limited due to security concerns, lack of basic services, and available livelihood opportunities in areas of return. Many families returning to their areas of origin continue to be at risk of being exposed to violence and face obstacles in accessing humanitarian assistance as a result of perceived IS affiliation, whereas others may be blocked from returning home by tribal authorities.

Eight years into the conflict in **Syria**, all parties continue to demonstrate total disregard for human life. In February, the international community unanimously agreed to alleviate human suffering by passing UN Security Council resolution 2401 which unequivocally demanded a 30-day ceasefire across the country. Yet, high levels of violence continue to devastate civilian lives and damage schools, hospitals and homes. Close to seven million Syrians are displaced within the country. In the first quarter of 2018, intense fighting erupted in Eastern Ghouta leading to loss of lives, massive suffering and the displacement of more than 100,000 people. Recent military operations in the South triggered the largest wave of mass displacement since the conflict started in 2011, with 330,000 people displaced¹. The needs were massive and humanitarian access became increasingly limited.

In the first half of 2018, the humanitarian situation for many in Syria has further deteriorated. Mass displacement in the North East, Idleb and Afrin, as well as from Eastern Ghouta and the South, has intensified the needs of already vulnerable Syrians, many of whom experienced multiple displacements. Sustained and unimpeded access and adequate funding are urgently required to support a scaled up and comprehensive emergency response. NRC continues to negotiate access to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable across the country, and are actively working to mobilise new funding. NRC has assisted more than 400,000 beneficiaries in the first half of 2018, and remains committed to prioritising quality programming to people in need.

In **Jordan**, the escalation of hostilities in South Syria since 17 June led to the displacement of an estimated 45,000-50,000 individuals to areas near the border with Jordan within Eastern Dara'a governorate. As of today end June, 42,000 IDPs were stranded at the Nasib border crossing in the free zone, with up to another 260,000 people displaced in the South. Others were seeking safety near Tal Shihab, while many moved up to Quneitra on the border with the occupied Golan Heights. This situation evolved heavily by the day.

¹ As of 4 July 2018

On the 4th of March 2018, the Government of Jordan and UNHCR announced the beginning of an amnesty/grace period, relaxing the criteria for Syrian nationals to be issued (1) an Asylum Seeker Certificate (ASCs) by UNHCR and (2) the Ministry of Interior (Mol) service cards by police stations. NRC is closely coordinating with UNCHR to support Syrians to reside legally in host communities. Finally, following four days of protests related to austerity measures in late May/early June, Prime Minister Hani al-Mulki stepped down and former education minister Omar Razzaz was appointed to replace him and set up a new government.

On the donor and programme side, funding shortfalls affecting UNHCR and UNICEF are likely to have a significant impact on Syrian refugees in the short-term with 30,000 vulnerable Syrian families in host communities at risk of losing their monthly UNHCR cash assistance and school drop-outs potentially increasing, as a result of UNICEF scaling down Hajati payments at the end of the 2017-18 academic year.

In **Lebanon**, several small-scale return movements of Syrian refugees have taken place in recent months. In April, 462 Syrians residing in Chebaa, South Lebanon returned to Beit Jenn. 294 people returned from Aarsal to Qualamoun in Western Syria in late June, and a further 49 persons departed from West Bekaa to Mo'adamiyyat al Sham near Damascus. UNHCR has conducted protection assessments and had access to individuals who were planning to return, but is not involved in the organisation of the return movements. There is no evidence that these returns were forced, and returnees are reported to have asked to be added to lists of people wishing to return. Additional small-scale spontaneous returns from these areas, and potentially others, are expected in the coming months.

Parallel to these movements, Lebanon's Minister of Foreign Affairs has accused UNHCR of actively discouraging refugee returns. UNHCR has denied the accusations and re-asserted that refugees who choose to return voluntarily are free to do so, while continuing to state a position that conditions in Syria are not conducive to returns in safety and dignity. While the agency's High Commissioner has met with the Minister in Geneva and UNHCR officials locally continue to seek a resolution, the Minister has ordered that processing and renewal of residency permits for UNHCR international staff be suspended.

A General Election was held on 6 May, the first since 2009. The election was the first held under a modified proportional representation electoral system, which also ensures representation of sectarian communities. As of the end of the quarter, the government is formally in a caretaker role pending negotiations among political parties and parliamentary factions regarding the formation of a national unity government. Incumbents Saad Hariri and Nabih Berri were re-elected Prime Minister and Speaker of Parliament, respectively.

In the West Bank, settlement expansion continues unabated, with thousands of new settlement homes announced in recent months, and continued evictions of **Palestinians** and demolition of houses and schools. In June 2018, the Israeli High Court of Justice authorized the demolition and forcible transfer of the Palestinian Bedouin community of Khan al Ahmar which would be a grave breach of the fourth Geneva Convention. This demolition could pave the way for the forcible transfer of another 45 Bedouin and herder communities also slated for relocation. Further, international and local NGOs are facing increasing challenges to deliver humanitarian assistance to vulnerable communities in Area C. Recent judicial reforms to the provision of legal aid to Palestinians will further limit their ability to claim their housing, land and property rights.

In Gaza, the unlawful Israeli blockade which severely limits, or prevents altogether, the entry and exit of materials both for humanitarian and development projects has now been in place for 12 years, with severe humanitarian consequences. Internal Palestinian divisions have further exacerbated the situation, as the Palestinian Authority (PA) has reduced the salaries of PA employees in Gaza by 30- 50%, forced the retirement of around 58,000 public employees and delayed cash assistance for over 74,000 vulnerable households

Protests have taken place along the fences in the Gaza border by Palestinians from Gaza to demonstrate their opposition to the denial of their rights under the Israeli occupation, and to demand their Right to Return. The Great March of Return, began in March and has claimed up to 135 lives and left hundreds severely injured. The death toll peaked on 14 May 2018 a day before Palestinians commemorated the 70th anniversary of the Nakba - the day of Israel's creation - which was also the date chosen by the US government to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

US cuts to UNRWA at the beginning of the year are fundamentally hampering its ability to provide emergency food aid, access to primary healthcare, access to primary education and other critical support to vulnerable populations and prepare for future deterioration.



This is Sinjar, Iraq, today, almost 3 years after being retaken from the Islamic State group. Our team there says that Iraqis who returned urgently need education and psychosocial support. NRC will be opening a community center to empower youth and provide education services and legal aid.

Photo: Alan Ayoubi/NRC

IRAQ

NRC is currently undertaking a shift to base operations in **Anbar** from Ramadi rather than from Baghdad. Whilst the **Baghdad** office will continue to operate with key management staff, the majority of support and programme staff will run operations in West Anbar from a new sub office in Al-Qa'im.

Through NRC's Education program, 25 teachers were trained in Amariyat Al-Khalidiya and Khalidiya camp on basic literacy and numeracy, Teachers' Code of Conduct, and Better Learning Program (BLP) to equip them with basic knowledge and skills to implement education programmes. In Al-Qa'im, 6,442 students (3,391 boys and 3,051 girls) enrolled in NRC-run summer activities in targeted schools in Al-Qa'im.

NRC's Information Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) team conducted an advocacy training with local tribal leaders and government officials in Anbar. The team further facilitated 18 General Information Sessions to displaced and returned families, mostly in Al-Qa'im. The team drew attention to significant civil documentation and housing, land and property rights and needs in Al-Qa'im, where courts are overwhelmed and some cases take up to three weeks to be processed.

In **Kirkuk/Erbil**, despite a number of access restrictions in entering Hawija as a result of ongoing military operations in the South, NRC was able to continue scaling up work in and around surrounding villages. In Q1 and Q2 of 2018, Erbil's ICLA team exceeded all project targets. General information session visits reached over 1,200 people, whilst our legal counselling services reached close to 850 individuals. The ICLA team continues to prioritize caseloads by vulnerability criteria and case intake dates.

In **West Mosul**, NRC opened the Community Center in the Rifa'i neighborhood, which includes youth and education programming. We are currently working on an assessment to expand operations in Sinjar and Baaj.

In **Dohuk and Northern Ninewa**, NRC provided school catch-up classes and psycho-social education support as part of the Better Learning Program (BLP) in six refugee and IDP camps. Adolescent girl club activities were also rolled out in these camps, and NRC further undertook registration and enrolment of beneficiaries in NRC summer school activities. Eleven general information sessions were held in Northern Ninewa for IDPs and returnees, to discuss issues such as marriage, civil and national documentation.



Education activities in Rawanga Camp in Duhok, Northern Iraq. NRC provides school catch-up classes and psycho-social support as part of the Better Learning Programme (BLP).

Photo: Tom Peyre-Costa/NRC

SYRIA RESPONSE

NRC hoped that 2018 would bring reduced violence, political solutions and possibilities of safe return home for Syrians across the country. Yet for every Syrian who returned home in 2017, three more were displaced. Returns to Raqqa and Deir Az Zour are far from safe as the cities remain heavily contaminated by explosive remnants of war (ERWs); clearance has been costly and slow. In an effort to mitigate premature and unsafe returns, NRC will not consider a response in these areas until it is safe to do so.

During the Eastern Ghouta crisis, NRC was the first INGO to respond to the sudden influx of fleeing civilians reaching overcrowded and ill-equipped shelters in rural Damascus. NRC responded by distributing **emergency relief** and setting up **temporary shelters** for those arriving exhausted, malnourished and fearful of what was to come. NRC staff initiated **emergency education activities** early on, paying close attention to children who were clearly distressed from months, if not years, of trauma.

During the Eastern Ghouta crisis, a major challenge was a **reluctance from donors** to fund the emergency response, and only one donor contacted NRC to provide emergency funding. Because of this, NRC prioritised internal and private funds to be able to scale up our response.

The situation in South Syria evolved quickly in July and displacement figures soared as the offensive progressed. NRC continuously advocated for the protection of Syrians amidst the military escalation.. Our focus is now on the Idlib crisis emergency response, the humanitarian impact of which is anticipated to be far greater than what was witnessed in Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta or South Syria.

With over 13 million Syrians in dire need of humanitarian aid, NRC remains concerned about the lack of international donors' commitments to the Whole of Syria response; the UN 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is only 41.5% per cent funded². A reduction in funding for NRC Syria has meant **scaling back areas of operation** and number of implemented programmes. Yet, in many parts of the country, the water and sanitation situation falls far short of international standards.



NRC education staff at Adra school doing activities for young children. The school was turned into a collective shelter for displaced families from Eastern Ghouta. NRC helped 1,200 children from Eastern Ghouta through educational activities and distribution of emergency aid.

Photo: Karl Schembri/NRC

² FTS figure as of 22 April 2018

JORDAN

As Syrian refugees have been living in Za'atari camp for nearly six years, the **shelter** team, in partnership with its national partner JOHD, have assessed caravans to determine which are in need of maintenance. Overall, NRC assessed 18,458 caravans (10,489 households) and concluded that 90% of shelters are at an acceptable standard. Since the average age of caravans is four and a half years, it appears that Syrian refugees are using their financial resources to maintain them. In April 2018, the team started validating caravans for repair, selecting 300 caravans for repair in the next quarter.

Over the past six months, the **ICLA** team in Jordan has been mainly preparing for and responding to the amnesty announced on the 4th of March. Since the announcement, the ICLA team has provided support, through referral to UNHCR and follow up of cases to 14,186 unique beneficiaries. According to UNHCR, more than 80% of the referrals they received came through NRC. As a result of ICLA counselling and referrals, 6,391 unique beneficiaries (45% of the ICLA amnesty-related caseload) were issued Asylum Seekers Certificates (ASC) allowing them to apply for Ministry of the Interior (MoI) cards, which legitimise their presence in host communities and gives them access to services. MoI cards were obtained by 2,627 unique beneficiaries (41% of the beneficiaries who obtained ASCs). NRC has also launched a social media strategy to maximise outreach to beneficiaries and information dissemination, while improving cost efficiency.

In Northern Jordan, the **education** team has been running a wash in school and a social cohesion programme in nine schools, completed rehabilitation works in six schools and expansion works in four. The education team in camps has continued implementing its Better Learning Programme (BLP) and started preparing for the summer programme at the Learning Centres. Children and adolescents are producing an anthology of poetry and drawings with the NGO the Voices of the Children project, which will be showcased in art exhibitions in Seattle, Azraq Camp and Amman. An e-book and digital app were produced in cooperation with the Kitabna association including a collection of illustrated children stories written by Syrian teachers in Azraq and Za'atari camps, and complemented with educational activities. The Camps Education team is also currently preparing to launch its work with formal schools in camps, directly supporting them to be able to better address the education and wellbeing needs of refugee children in camps.

The **youth/livelihoods** team has developed a new compatibility toolkit and methodology to profile potential employers and young job-seekers for the implementation of its new Transition to Employment (T2E) Programme. The programme aims to place and retain Syrian and Jordanian youth in formal employment that matches their skills and expertise, as well as the employers' needs, while also developing youth's overall employability profile through employment preparation and mentoring.



Cellphone maintenance is a training coordinated by NRC's Youth programme in Za'atari camp. NRC has provided certified vocational training opportunities to Syrian youth since 2013.

Photo: Leen Qashu/NRC

LEBANON

NRC Lebanon's **Emergency Response Unit** has identified 814 household and community-level emergencies in the Bekaa Valley. The majority of these emergency cases are new arrivals from Syria, but also include fires, evictions, flooding and secondary displacement. NRC had a 91% response rate through direct responses and fast-tracked referrals.

Post-distribution monitoring of **emergency cash distribution** was completed with a survey of households receiving cash assistance. Results showed an overall satisfaction rate of 77%, though only 37% of beneficiaries said that the amount (\$300) was sufficient. 98% of households were satisfied with the timeliness and accessibility of the assistance. Food, NFIs, and repayment of debts were the top three expenses identified.

Several **Community Support Projects** including boreholes, solid waste containers, a solid waste sorting facility, and a drainage network were handed over to municipalities and water establishments. Community Support Projects provide much needed investment in WASH infrastructure in Lebanese host communities.

In addition, NRC is the lead agency in three new **consortia**:

MADAD-WASH focuses on reaching the most vulnerable host communities and refugee populations through empowering governing authorities, promoting sustainable water services, and providing an enabling environment that promotes improved living conditions to vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities. The consortium includes GVC, NRC, OXFAM and World Vision and is funded by the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (the MADAD Fund).

The Cash Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Organisational Network (CAMEALEON) will conduct independent evaluations around WFP's multi-purpose cash transfer programme in Lebanon. The focus is on contributing to increased effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and learning of cash programming. CAMEALEON is funded by DFID, ECHO, Norway and Germany. Oxfam and Solidarités International are consortium partners.

The **Lebanon Protection Consortium**, funded by ECHO, is focused on improving overall aid effectiveness and accountability through the provision of an integrated protection response to address the protection needs of the most vulnerable people affected by displacement in Lebanon. Partners include ACF and GVC.



“I arrived with my son ten days ago to Lebanon, we fled the insecure situation in Syria. I’d rather live in a tent than risking our lives, it is more safe here.” said Iman, a Syrian refugee living in an informal tented settlement in the Bekaa valley. NRC supports newly arrived Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Photo: Nadine Malli/NRC

PALESTINE

In **Gaza** in the first half of 2018, NRC entered in an ECHO-funded partnership with Action Against Hunger (ACF) and Premiere Urgence International (PUI) to increase the resilience and protective environment of communities and vulnerable households at risk of IHL and IHRL violations in the Gaza strip. The project will use an integrated approach of household-level support, emergency preparedness and response, and protection and advocacy.

The NRC Shelter/WASH team continued to reach vulnerable households with cash assistance to repair their homes, the ICLA team coordinated legal assistance on housing land and property rights with NRC Shelter, UNOPS and UNRWA and the Education team continued to provide technical assistance to over 50 schools giving psycho-social educational support to children. A survey conducted by NRC after protests began in Gaza, revealed that 56% of Palestinian children are suffering from traumatic nightmares with a rise of post-traumatic symptoms, including fears, anxiety, and stress. The NRC UDOC team also conducted and published an IDP vulnerability assessment, updating information on critical needs in Gaza to be used by Humanitarian actors and stakeholders to better design their response to the ongoing needs.

In the **West Bank**, the ICLA programme followed up on key legal cases to prevent forcible transfer of at-risk communities in Area C, and coordinated with key legal partners in addressing the escalating threat of demolitions of community structures and homes, and called for international action through its advocacy work. The Education team continued support to 91 schools, however NRC is in the process of phasing-out from 30 schools in West Bank after a two/three-year intervention successfully building the capacity building of teaching and non-teaching staff.



Ibrahim Al-Jahaleen (Abu Ibrahim) is a resident at Abu Nuwar. Bedouin communities in the West Bank face an immediate threat of being transferred to other areas against their will following the forced eviction of the Palestinian Bedouin community of Khan Al-Ahmar.

Photo: Ameen Nayfeh/NRC

In Palestine, NRC was vocal about the damaging impact of US cuts to UNRWA, including through issuing a [press release](#), a [statement](#) by NRC Secretary General and coordinating [international advocacy efforts](#) with other humanitarian organisations, as well as raising concern about the conduct of Israeli forces in the context of the Great March of Return by issuing a [press release](#) highlighting the growing number of nightmares children face, and [another one](#) about attacking protestors particularly after the fatal shooting of a photojournalist we had commissioned. In response to the tightening of the blockade on Gaza, NRC produced an interagency [briefing note](#) with Premier Urgence and Oxfam, highlighting the humanitarian impacts of the increased restrictions and calling for an immediate lifting of the blockade. The briefing illustrated that 53% of the population in Gaza is living under the poverty line, whilst more than 49% are unemployed (60% of youth and 71% of women), and more than one million Palestinians in Gaza don't have enough food.

In Iraq, NRC led advocacy and media work, linked with our programme activities in country, led to substantial policy impact on returning Iraqis. The team provided contextual updates to donors/diplomats in real-time, engaged with local authorities in the field, and with UN leadership. We also continued advocating towards donors and government actors to improve the functionality of the Governorate Returns Committees. This was combined with both unbranded and branded NRC media work, culminating in the publication of a major advocacy report "The Long Road Home", which generated significant international attention and led to high-level engagement with the authorities in Baghdad. This resulted in a temporary reduction on forced returns of IDPs to their areas of origin, and a shift in the official rhetoric and public narrative on returns in the country. In July, NRC published a [media package](#) for the one year anniversary of the retaking of Mosul. NRC was one of the few humanitarian organizations that managed to publish photos and videos on the anniversary of the retaking of Mosul and, of those who did, received the highest share of press coverage globally, regionally, and nationally with at least media 76 mentions including major newswires such as Reuters, AP, [AFP](#), in addition to mentions on [Al Jazeera](#), [The National](#), and publishing a photo story on [Al Jazeera](#).

Significant efforts centred around the issue of return for Syrian refugees and the availability of other durable solutions. This included the launch of a major, interagency advocacy report "Dangerous Ground" which received significant international attention and set the scene for our advocacy priorities in the lead up to the Brussels conference.

At the Brussels conference itself, there was a direct commitment by Lebanon to continue the fee waiver for residency applications for Syrian refugees. Brussels also saw progress in addressing the issue of residency for refugees who have turned 15 years old, which was specifically acknowledged during the conference, as one of NRC's top line priorities. NRC advocacy also contributed to an increased recognition of Housing, Land and Property (HLP) and civil documentation rights as critical humanitarian issues that need to be addressed, with both being acknowledged in the co-chair's statement.

In Jordan, More than 330,000 Syrians from Daraa were displaced - the largest ever displacement in the Syrian war, and thousands were pushed towards the Jordanian border as a result of the government's offensive. NRC issued two press releases appealing to the Jordanian government to ensure that the displaced can seek refugee across the border. 92 media mentions and interviews were recorded including major newswires such as [Reuters](#), [Arabic Reuters](#), [AP](#) and [AFP](#). A noticeable number of interviews was recorded on [Al Jazeera English](#), [NPR](#), [CBC](#), [BBC World Service](#), [Al Hadath](#), [Al Jazeera Arabic](#) and [Radio Al-Balad](#).

Palestine

[Palestine country office fact sheet](#)

Lebanon

[Lebanon country office fact sheet](#)

Syria Response

[Syria Response office fact sheet](#)

Jordan

[Jordan country office fact sheet](#)

Iraq

[Iraq country office fact sheet](#)

Media & Advocacy

[Dangerous Ground report](#)

[Long Road Home report](#)

[Gaza blockade briefing note](#)



NRC education staff engage with Syrian youth at a warehouse in Adra. This warehouse turned into a collective shelter for displaced families from Eastern Ghouta.

Photo: Karl Schembri/NRC

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