

NRC Middle East Quarterly Newsletter

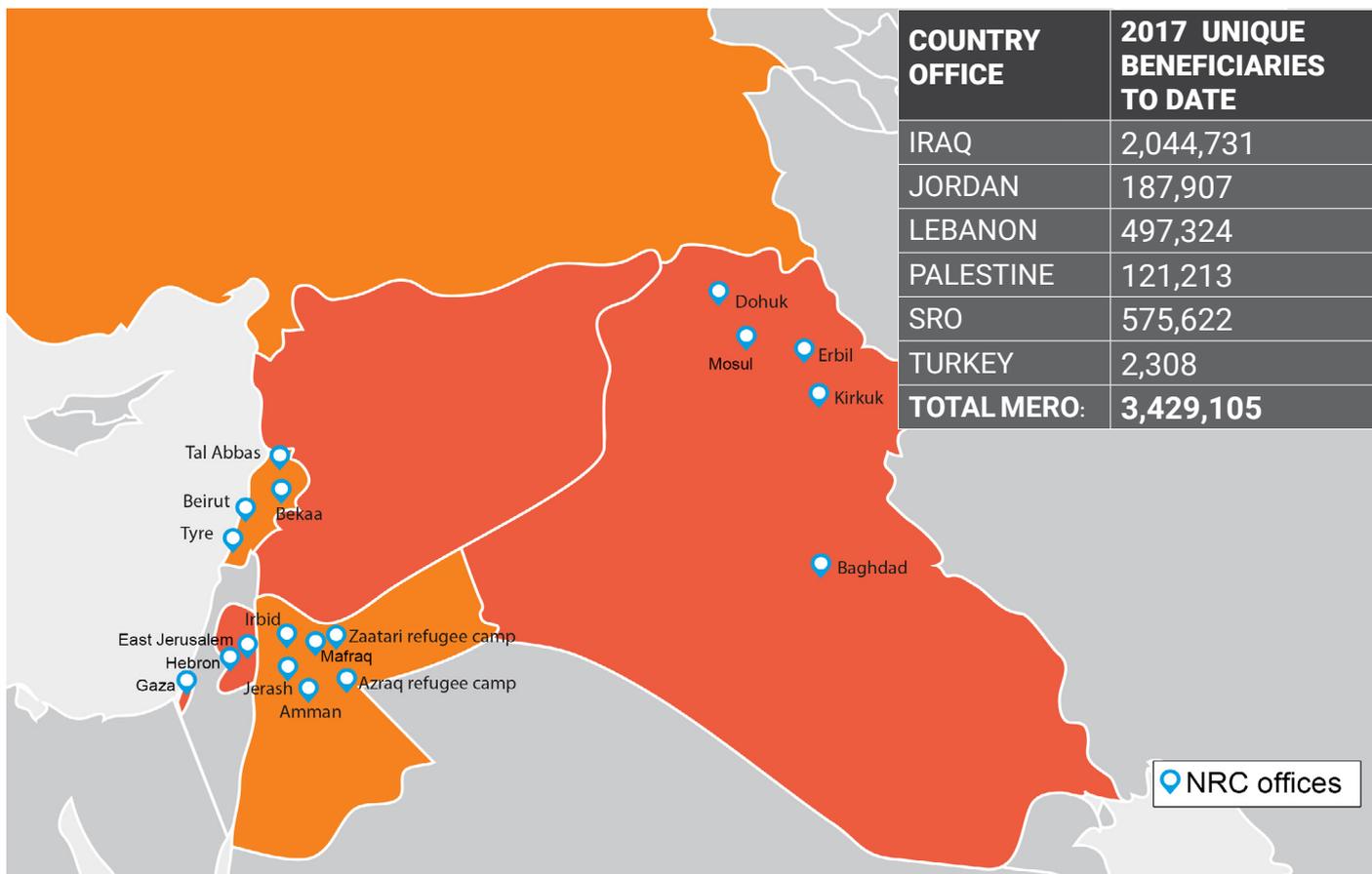
Quarter 4, 2017



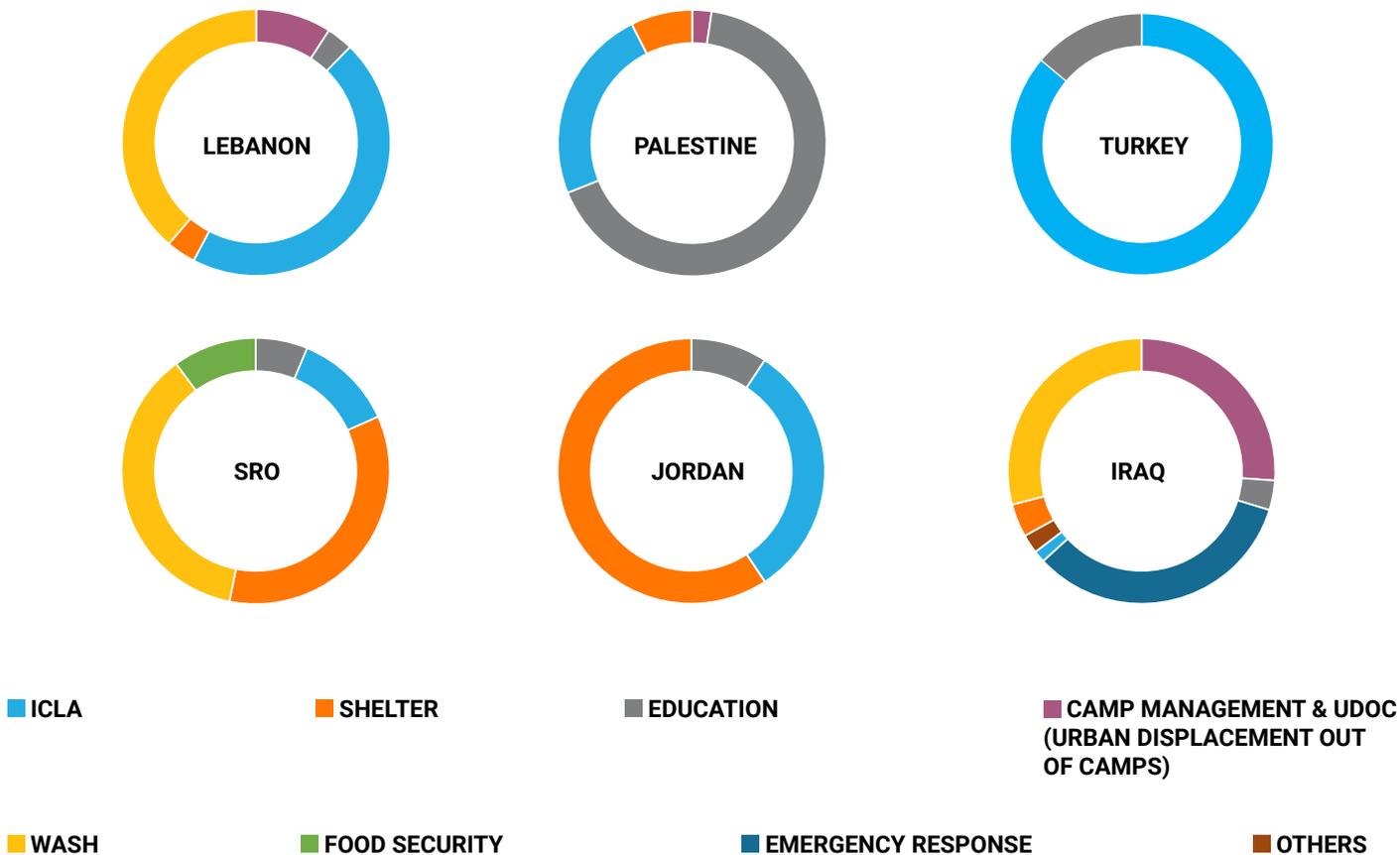
Displaced people are registered by NRC at Hammam al-Alil camp in Iraq, as they wait for tents and supplies. Around 20,500 people currently live there with no home to go back to.

Photo: Lam Duc Hien/NRC.

UNIQUE BENEFICIARIES BY COUNTRY:



BENEFICIARIES BY CC:



During the last quarter of 2017, the **Iraqi** government retook control of the ISIS's remaining urban centers, Hawija and Shirqat, in the governorate of the Kirkuk, displacing another 20,000 Iraqis into camps in Kirkuk and surrounding areas. Following this, the Iraqi security forces retook control of the last ISIS strongholds in Western Anbar, leading the Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Al Abadi to declare victory over ISIS in Iraq on 9 December 2017. Following the Kurdish independence referendum on 25 September, the Iraqi government imposed a ban on international flights to/from Erbil and Sulaymaniyeh in the Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI). As the fight against ISIS in Iraq was coming to a close, the Iraqi government advanced on territories with disputed control between Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and the federal Iraqi Government (GoI), starting with regaining control of the highly contested, oil rich city of Kirkuk. While casualties were relatively low, the GoI military advance on the disputed territories caused more than 100,000 people to flee, largely to areas firmly within Kurdish control.

During the last quarter of 2017, although there were several positive developments, the overall humanitarian situation inside **Syria** significantly deteriorated. NRC has witnessed new mass displacements due to conflict in the North West and North East. Furthermore, the besieged area of Eastern Ghouta has seen some of the worst level of fighting in over five years, putting at least 350,000 civilians at urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Idleb Governorate in the North West witnessed intensified shelling through December with air and ground-based strikes reported on nearly a daily basis.

Camp conditions in North East Syria remain poor and inadequate, especially in these cold winter months. The last quarter saw large new displacement as the major battles against ISIS ended, forcing as many as 400,000 people to flee during the month of October alone. Premature and unsafe returns, especially to areas in and around Raqqa, have been a major concern. In the South of Syria, the vast majority of IDPs remain in protracted displacement due to continued hostilities and lack of adherence to the de-escalation zone agreement. IDPs also face significant barriers to safe and sustainable returns.

In positive news, in December, NRC welcomed the renewal of the UN Security Council Resolution 2165 authorizing the delivery of humanitarian assistance across borders and conflict lines in Syria for a further 12 months. NRC has consistently called on the international community to ensure that aid reaches all those in need through the most direct routes.

Returns are continuing to Syria from **Jordan**, however, as of November 2017, there was a significant drop in the number of people voluntarily returning. In November 410 Syrians voluntarily returned, a decrease of 878 from October. The trend continued in December, when only 347 Syrian refugees returned. According to UNHCR, the majority of the returnees are originally from Dara'a governorate. Since August 2017, there has been a new trend of Syrian refugees being relocated to Village 5 in Azraq camp from Zaatari camp and host communities. There has been 979 individuals (232 families) relocated in the past six months, with UNHCR suggesting that this relocation is being used as an alternative to deportation back to Syria. It remains unclear whether these are temporary or permanent measures. In this period, "amnesty" is being negotiated in order to regularise the status of certain categories of Syrian refugees residing outside of camps in Jordan. The categories eligible will be clarified at the time of the official announcement of the amnesty. Once the policy is implemented, and for a defined period only, individuals fitting these categories will be able to update their registration with UNHCR in urban areas and access MoI registration in host communities, according to the standing requirements. Operational details of this policy have not been communicated publicly yet.

The political crisis that ensued when Prime Minister Said Hariri unexpectedly resigned was resolved when Hariri returned to **Lebanon** from Saudi Arabia several weeks later, revoking his resignation. Hariri revoked his resignation after President Michel Aoun refused to accept it and the rallying of Lebanese political parties around the issue. As a result, the Government of Lebanon reiterated its “disassociation policy” toward conflicts in the region, notably the Syria conflict. There was a significant increase in eviction orders and other restrictions targeted toward Syrian refugees issued by municipalities. Several municipalities in North Lebanon and Mount Lebanon, either issued or threatened eviction orders. Additional restrictive actions included curfews, increased monitoring and reporting requirements, and other coercive measures. NRC anticipates that evictions may increase in frequency in the lead up to elections scheduled for May 2018. NRC's Evictions Cell and early warning systems are being established to provide protection and advocacy components to humanitarian sector responses.

The results of a census of the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon were released in December 2017. According to the census, there are 174,422 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, not including approximately 32,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria. This total is down substantially from previous estimates of approximately 270,000, though there has been some debate within the community about the accuracy of the figures. In conjunction with the release of census results, Prime Minister Said Hariri has committed to taking the report recommendations to cabinet, including a call for increased rights for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

In **Palestine**, the US announcement regarding the status of Jerusalem has created uncertainty regarding the future, bringing protests, political implications and a halt to the reconciliation process in its wake. The related American cut of funding to UNRWA threatens to significantly exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip while also severely impacting Palestine Refugees in the West Bank and regionally. Meanwhile, moves to annex the West Bank lands are accelerating as threats to carry out the relocation of communities in Area C of the West Bank persist, with political announcements and official State responses to the High Court stating that plans to relocate or demolish communities will be carried out in the coming months. A ruling to demolish a school supported by NRC in the Al Muntar community was also given by the HCJ. Alongside this threat, settlement expansion persists while new policies and practices are utilized in taking over more privately owned Palestinian land while retroactively legalizing past land takeovers for settlement needs. New procedures in the Government of Israel further normalize the settlements and legislation for settlers and the governing party, Likud, has added the application of Israeli sovereignty to the settlement areas to its platform. In East Jerusalem, approximately one third of the Palestinian residents are at risk of being cut off from their city and potentially of being stripped of their residency status in the future.

The working environment for humanitarian organizations in **Turkey** remained challenging in the last part of the year. NRC's INGO registration in Turkey expired in May 2017. Since then, and in line with the prevailing regulatory framework, NRC closed its offices and suspended its operations in the country. In parallel, NRC continued to engage with the Turkish authorities for its registration to get renewed.

IRAQ

The **Hawija returns response** has been a key focus area for NRC in Q4 and the first scoping mission was conducted in the Hawija District. Villages assessed had a high percentage of IDPs returns, however, lacked access to essential services and had urgent water, cash and NFI needs. NRC responded to such displacements in Kirkuk with WASH, GBV, ICLA and NFI programming in six IDP camps. NRC also continued to provide services for IDPs in Erbil Camps, reaching more than 8,000 children through Education programming, and 1,400 people through ICLA.

In **Dohuk**, NRC continued to provide shelter, education and ICLA assistance in both camps and non-camp settings. A number of families had their houses rehabilitated while material was provided for the construction of 143 houses in Domiz. NRC has also supported schools through the provision of incentives for teachers and stationary in already existing schools, as well as renovation of existing schools and construction of new ones. Additionally, dignity kits were distributed to girls in a number of villages. ICLA provided support on civil documentation and housing, land and property, as well as training on advocacy and collaborative dispute resolution to community leaders and NGO focal points.

In **Mosul**, NRC's ICLA team started working in IOM's Community Information Centers in East and West Mosul, providing counselling and legal assistance to recent returnees with an emphasis on housing land and property rights. The Camp Management team carried out assessments in West Mosul to finalise the selection of the location of NRC's planned community center, through which multi-sector assistance will be given to host, displaced and returnee populations. The Shelter team distributed 385 sealing-off kits along with the provision of cash to 670 vulnerable households living in six neighbourhoods. The Livelihoods and Cash teams continue assessments in the Hamdaniyah district of Ninewa.

In **Anbar**, NRC continued its efforts in camp management, shelter/WASH, ICLA, education and through the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) and cash. The team ensures that the IDPs have a voice through their engagement in camp committees. In addition, NRC's teams monitor and report on evictions and voluntary movement of IDPs leaving the camps.



Khalab Bellou carries his son Muhamed who was born in Mosul with no valid birth certificate. He is receiving advice from Karwan, a lawyer working for NRC.

Photo: Lam Duc Hien/NRC

SYRIA RESPONSE

Despite numerous challenges throughout the year, in 2017, NRC was able to assist more than 500 000 people in Syria with over 1 700 000 humanitarian services. To monitor the impact of our work, NRC received individual feedback from 83 787 of our beneficiaries through mobile data collection and called 10 906 beneficiaries on the phone. This has helped ensure quality of programming, continuous learning and mitigate risk of aid diversion.

NRC **continues to meet the needs of displaced populations** and host communities inside Syria, including through the successful rollout of I-WISH (integrated Wash, ICLA, Shelter) programmes, providing IDPs with rehabilitated shelter, complimented with documentation to prove rightful ownership. As Syrian families and children face their eighth year of conflict, NRC continues to advocate for their rights, for sustained access to humanitarian assistance, and for durable solutions for those wishing to return home.

NRC continues to help tens of thousands of Syria's 1.75 million¹ out of school children and youth **return to learning**. Education activities include catch-up classes, self-learning sessions, recreational activities, psychosocial support initiatives, and interactive theatre and art workshops. These activities support children to reconnect with peers and learning, enable them to access age-appropriate education pathways, and minimize risk of dropout resulting from underachievement or psychological trauma.

Through vocational entrepreneurial skills training, **NRC helps youth** enhance their capacity to access employment opportunities and meet their basic needs. Beginner and advanced tailoring courses, for example, enabled women, especially female-headed households, to have sufficient knowledge and skills to apply for a job in, or run, a professional clothesline.



Ibrahim (left), 12, from Raqqa, has been out of school for five years and has worked at a used auto parts market. He is now attending a learning centre in Sahnaya called the House of Love, supported by NRC, and has also been attending the Summer School run by NRC.

Photo: Karl Schembri/NRC

¹<https://hno-syria.org/#key-figures>

JORDAN

As Syrian refugees continue to face significant challenges to access adequate and affordable housing, the **Shelter** team has been renovating substandard shelters and providing rent assistance to vulnerable Syrians in host communities, providing them with safe living conditions, as well as relieving them from the highest household expenditure. This, in turn, allows vulnerable families to find work, purchase food, or pay off any outstanding debt.

During this period, in both Azraq and Zaatari camps, the **Shelter** team distributed winterisation support from UNHCR, which included gas cylinders, heaters, blankets, insulation, plastic sheeting, and cash. In Azraq, this support reached 7,095 households, and in Zaatari it reached 16,372 households. Additionally, NRC teams distributed one-off UNICEF cash grants to families with children, amounting to 20 JOD per child.

In both the host communities and camps, the **Youth** team implemented a range of trainings for Syrian refugees aged 16-26 years. They completed three entrepreneurship trainings, started an English course with Arizona State University, and initiated job matching with ten potential candidates, of which seven accepted job offers. At King Talal dam, Jordanian and Syrian workers began forestation activities on the site, as part of the **Livelihoods** cash for work project with GIZ. In the coming year, this livelihoods project will see an expansion of sites and workers, and the team are currently securing work permits for the next group of workers.

In November, the **Education** team expanded the walk to school activities to village 5 in Azraq camp, which is the fenced off area of the camp. The Learning Centre selected nine volunteers, who then spread awareness of the walk to school initiative around village 5. Overall, by the end of December, 230 children were involved in the walk to school activity in both village 3 and village 5 of Azraq camp.



Syrian women waiting in line to collect blankets, preparing their households for winter.

Photo: Leen Qashu/NRC

LEBANON

Lebanon's two-year third party monitoring of WFP's **multipurpose cash** programme, the Cash Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Organisational Network (CAMEALEON), was launched with funding provided by ECHO, DFID, Germany and Norway. The Community Management and Coordination team established a new **Emergency Unit** in the Bekaa Valley to serve as an early warning system to flag emergencies at household level and in informal tented settlements with an emergency team prepared for urgent deployment. Teams are focused on immediate response based on existing supply stock, fast-tracking referrals, and emergency cash assistance. The Emergency Unit will rely heavily on our existing network of trained community representatives and will have reach throughout the Bekaa Valley to flag emergencies such as new arrivals from Syria, emergency WASH and health issues, and fires. 40 emergency cases were identified in the first month of operation, the majority related to new arrivals from Syria.

NRC contributed to a **coordinated humanitarian response to a series of eviction orders** and other municipal restrictions on refugees in the Mount Lebanon region. Working with other INGOs and the UNHCR Protection Working Group, ICLA teams' eviction monitoring, reporting and referrals contributed to the protection module of the response, while advocacy to donors, the diplomatic community, UN agencies and government representatives comprised the advocacy component of the response. NRC is currently in the process of establishing an Evictions Cell and early warning system with both advocacy and protection components in order to be able to be at the forefront of the response to anticipated future refugee evictions.



"I was very happy when I got my official exams' result with a good standing, the exams were like a piece of cake for me." said Yasmine, 17. Yasmine joined our learning support programme where she took English, Maths, and Arabic classes.

Photo: Nadine Malli/NRC

PALESTINE

In the fourth quarter of 2017, Israel demolished 62 structures (including 6 donor-funded), sealed 1 structure, and confiscated 7 structures (including 1 donor-funded), forcibly displacing 25 Palestinian households, consisting of 133 people (including 66 women and 73 children) and negatively affecting the livelihoods of 808 others. Nonetheless, by the close of 2017, in the West Bank/E Jerusalem, the ICLA team had a caseload of 4,116 individual cases, 81% received **interim protective measures**. Moreover, of the 2,180 individual cases closed in 2017, 43% of beneficiaries received **durable protection from forcible transfer**. In Gaza, the ICLA team continued to promote housing, land and property rights in close coordination with the Shelter team, UNOPS and UNRWA through the provision of legal counselling and assistance. During Q4, a multi-sectorial needs assessment on the Refugees from the Region stranded in Gaza was finalized and presented to stakeholders in Gaza.

NRC's **Shelter/WASH** programme continued to provide conditional cash to most vulnerable Gazans to repair their remaining war-damaged homes and/or upgrade their substandard housing units to a minimum housing standard and decent housing conditions. Complementary, NRC distributed bedding kits to protect vulnerable households from the cold in winter, and provided essential hygiene items and hygiene trainings to increase personal and household hygiene.

NRC's **Education** programme continues to operate in 89 schools in 6 of the West Banks most vulnerable directorates. The "**Better Learning Program**" (BLP1 and BLP2) training targeted 73 counsellors and 352 teachers on techniques designed to help deal with traumatized students and all students and faculty affected by the occupation. 7,613 students received psycho-social support from teachers and counsellors who are trained by NRC. These students, along with their parents, teachers and counsellors received legal awareness sessions on how to handle violations/incidents related to the occupation; settler violence, checkpoints, detention orders, etc. NRC conducted capacity building for its main partner, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, on BLP1 and 2, to guarantee the program's sustainability. The programme with the MoEHE steering committee continues to work together and assess the schools' needs for providing emergency capacitation grants and any educational materials, to ensure continued education implementation despite all obstacles.



Amir Al Najjar, 9, is standing in front of his school that is run by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA).

Photo: Mazen Naim/NRC

NRC played a leading role coordinating advocacy initiatives in the lead up to the renewal of U.N Security Council Resolution 2165 that authorizes cross-border aid into Syria from neighbouring countries, including direct advocacy in Geneva, London and Paris as well as working with various forums and coalitions to ensure consistency of strategy and message. On 19th December 2017, the Security Council adopted resolution 2393, extending the authorisation for UN agencies and implementing partners to use the four mandated border crossings for aid delivery, incorporating a strengthened monitoring mechanism.

In expanding NRC's sphere of advocacy initiatives to a wider range of regional and global interlocutors, SRO's Deputy Country Director & MERO's Regional Director travelled to Moscow to engage in a round table discussion on humanitarian access and operational modalities inside Syria. In addition, NRC senior leaders visited Damascus, Tehran and Riyadh to meet with key stakeholders, advocating for humanitarian access, and a scale up of NRC's activities to reach more people with essential aid.

In the wake of the demolition of three educational facilities in Palestine by Israeli authorities in August 2017, NRC issued a [press release](#) highlighting that two further EU-funded schools in the West Bank are now under threat of demolition. In accordance with NRC's policy, attacks on educational facilities, among others, are considered a "green line", in that they represent an automatic trigger to speak out.

NRC Iraq engaged in significant media work throughout the various military campaigns to retake key locations previously held by the Islamic State group. In the aftermath of the Hawija offensive, NRC's country director was quoted in a number of international outlets, including [CNN](#), [NBC](#), noting that the importance of ensuring all returns in Iraq are "informed, voluntary and happen only after areas are safe and basic services can be provided". See the full [press release](#) and [web story](#) here.

Several news outlets reported on the expulsion of hundreds of foreign women and children with alleged links to IS group from Iraq cited NRC. Norwegian media including [NRK](#), [Fjordabladet](#), [Klassekampen](#), [Avisa Møre](#) and [ABC Nyheter](#) quoted NRC's calls for "humanitarian access to these women and children".

NRC's Secretary General visited Iraq in November 2017. A press release concerning his visit was picked up by [Reuters](#), and he was interviewed by [Alsharqiya TV](#) about the situation in Iraq.

The SG was further interviewed by [Al Jazeera English](#) and [BBC World Service](#) on the humanitarian situation in Eastern Ghouta, Syria. SRO's Deputy Country Director was also interviewed by [Al Jazeera English](#) following his visit to the country, expressing his hope "that 2018 will be a better year for Syria".



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Photo: Mazen Naim/NRC

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](#)



The suburb of Al Bakir, Ramadi was almost completely destroyed during the military operation to retake the city from the Islamic State group at the end of 2015. The streets were filled with rubble and NRC recently cleared the streets and other areas of the debris.

Photo: Melany Markham/NRC

Rights Respected, People Protected