

# NRC Middle East Quarterly Newsletter

Quarter 3, 2017

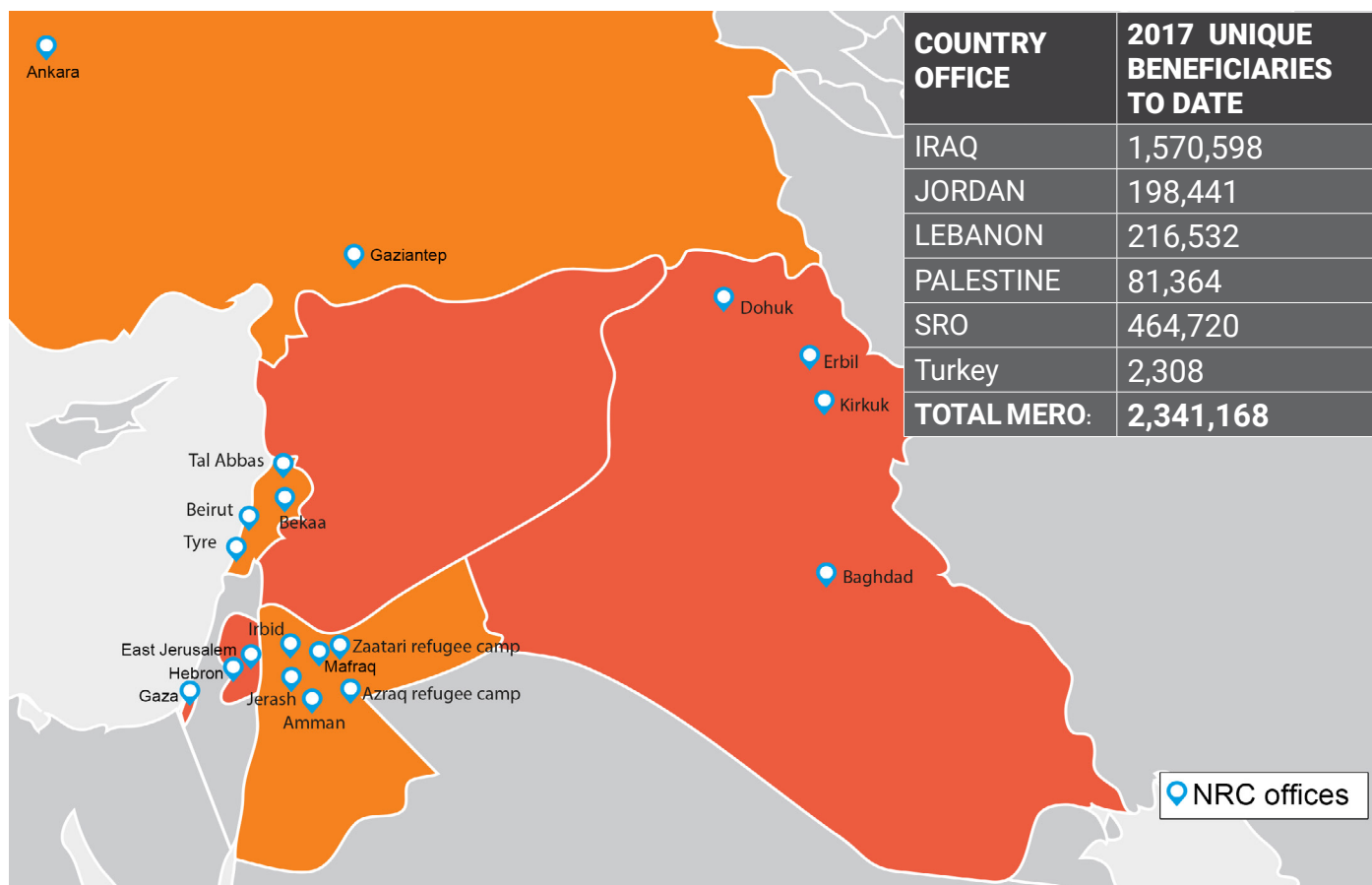


Three girls from Al Muntar Bedouin community in the West Bank. Their school is currently facing a demolition order, pending a decision from the Israeli High Court.

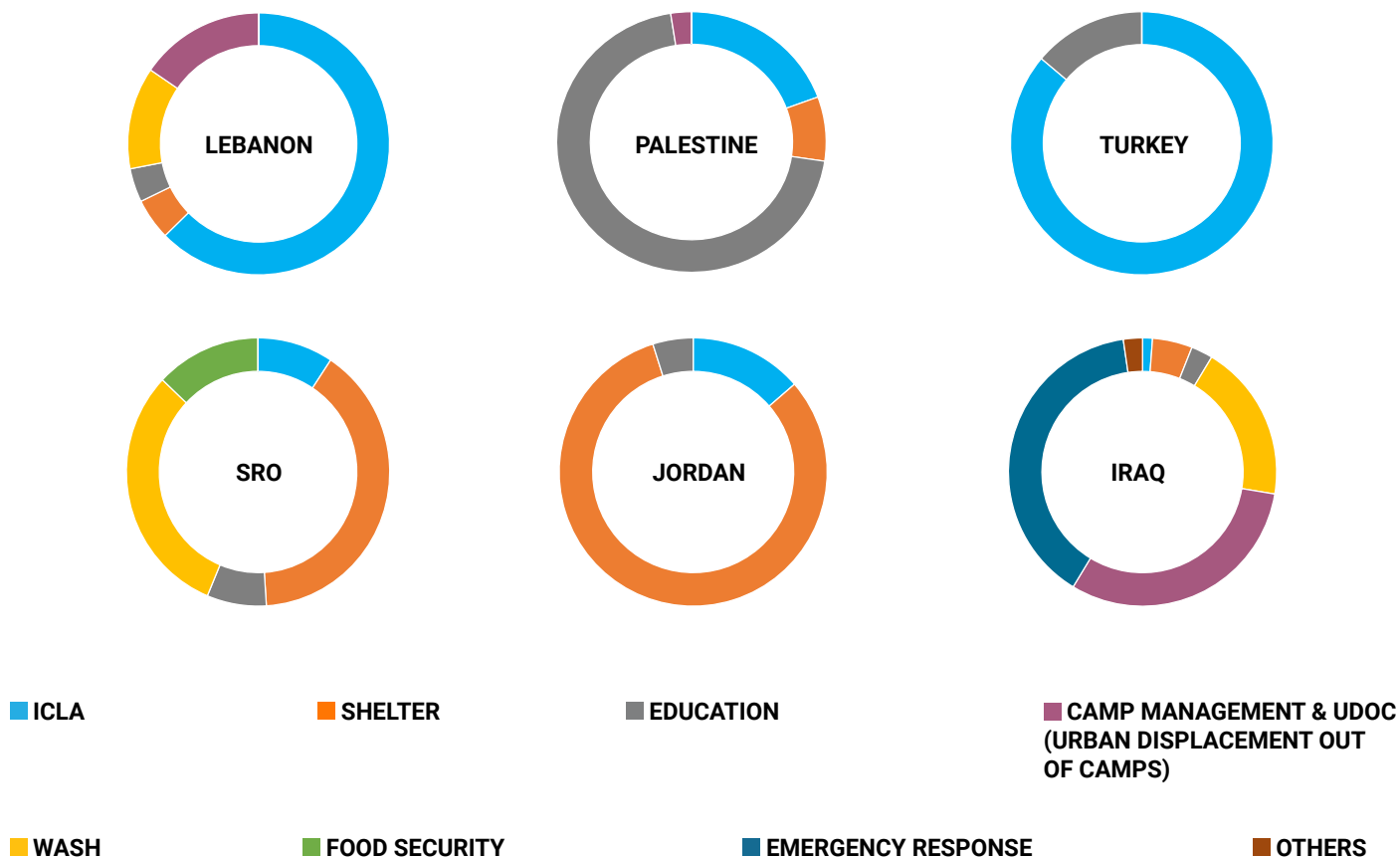
Photo: Lys Arango



## UNIQUE BENEFICIARIES BY COUNTRY:



## BENEFICIARIES BY CC:



In 2017, the fight against the Islamic State group (IS) in **Iraq** centred around the country's second largest city, Mosul, and caused the displacement of 1.2 million people. Although 28% have already returned, 72% are still displaced, bringing the total number of people currently displaced across Iraq to 3.2 million (IOM), and the number who have returned to more than 2 million. A referendum for Kurdish independence in October triggered further military movement that resulted in the Iraqi government taking control of areas previously disputed between the Kurdish Regional Government and the federal Iraqi government, causing further displacement.

The **southern de-escalation agreement** established in the south of **Syria** in May has led to a considerable reduction in aerial bombardment, however levels of violence remain high, particularly as fighting between opposition armed groups persists. There has been heightened violence in **Idlib governorate** in the north west, and civilians continue to get caught in the cross-fire. The offensive against IS group in Raqqa came to an end on 20 October, as Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) retook the city. Final efforts by the Government of Syria to retake **Deir Az Zour** from IS group continue, their last major strategic stronghold inside Syria. People have been displaced in their thousands, and IDP camps are well over capacity, struggling to meet the humanitarian needs, especially with winter around the corner. Both Raqqa and Deir Az Zour remain unsafe for civilians to return to, with severe damage to infrastructure and high levels of contamination of explosive remnants of war (ERWs). The **Astana peace talks** are moving forward ahead of the Geneva process, with opposition groups coming together to better engage in the political process. Many parts of Syria remain unsafe for people to return home. Despite this, NRC has begun to see people return to parts of Aleppo and Idlib governorates in the absence of safe and appropriate conditions. Steps must be taken to ensure that pre-conditions for return are first agreed upon, including the restoration of civil documentation and establishment of property dispute resolution mechanisms.

In **Jordan**, to support access to employment in Zaatari camp, ILO and the Ministry of Labour opened the first employment office in a refugee camp in Jordan. In September, the Zaatari office registered over 3,000 work permits, which represents 10% of the camp population work force and 6% of female refugees. Over 86% of the work permits were obtained for the agricultural sector. As of September, 58,661 work permits have been issued to Syrian refugees in Jordan.

UNHCR reported that in September, a total of 1,341 Syrians from camps and host communities returned to Syria. Most of them are from Dara'a governorate. It remains unclear whether they are returning to their place of origin or to a different area. This is the highest number of spontaneous returns recorded since October 2015. The NRC ICLA team in South Syria reported that Syrian refugees returning from Jordan are having their Ministry of Interior cards and UNHCR Asylum Seeker Certificates confiscated at the border.

In the area of the Hadalat crossing on the Syrian-Jordanian border ('the Berm'), a visible decrease in shelters was reported in September. According to different sources, shelters have been dismantled and the population has been moved to Rukban camp. There has been no resumption of humanitarian assistance in the Berm, and it is unlikely that these people will be allowed to enter Jordan.

In June and July UNHCR **Lebanon** reported that several hundred Syrian families had returned to the Qualamoun area of Syria in a deal between Hezbollah and Syrian armed groups seeking shelter in Lebanon. UNHCR Lebanon reported that most of these refugees voiced a desire to return out of a combination of dire economic conditions and security concerns. Further to these actions security operations led by the LAF and Hezbollah were conducted against non-state armed groups in Aarsal and Ras Baalbeck, with ceasefires resulting in an estimated 6,000-10,000 refugees being returned to Syria by bus, facilitated

by non-state armed groups. Security agencies reported that these returnees were “militants and their families” and UNHCR was not given advance access to those departing and has not been able to issue a determination as to whether these returns could be labeled as “voluntary” or “forced.”

These movements coincide with a significant increase of negative rhetoric regarding refugees and discussions regarding the need to urgent returns. In a speech to the UN General Assembly in September, Lebanese President Michel Aoun insisted that Lebanon was not prepared to wait for voluntary returns, and that refugees should be returned as soon as possible with or without UN engagement, owing to a claim that 85% of Syria is safe. These claims were then repeated on a state visit to France and by other political leaders, alongside indications that some members of government believe that full engagement with the government of Syria should be resumed. Other members of the Cabinet have countered this position, insisting that any refugee returns must be UN-facilitated, and that the “Disassociation policy” with Syria should continue.

In **Palestine**, the reconciliation efforts between Palestinian factions are ongoing and could reshape the reality in Gaza. Pending the outcome, the repercussions on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is still unclear. In Area C of the West Bank, communities at risk of forcible transfer face a heightened threat, 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. This comes alongside a renewed upsurge in destruction and confiscation of Palestinian property in the West Bank and the systematic obstruction of relief efforts to communities at risk. Alongside this threat, settlement expansion persists while new policies and practices are utilised in taking over more privately owned Palestinian land while retroactively legalising past land takeovers for settlement needs. In East Jerusalem, approximately one-third of the Palestinian residents are at risk of being cut off from their city, with legislation proceeding which will effectively redraw the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem by reallocating municipal powers and responsibilities. This legislation may also include annexation of settlement blocs to Jerusalem, though thus far international pressure has prevented this element from moving forward.

During the third quarter of the year, the working environment for humanitarian organizations in **Turkey** remained challenging. 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.



Iraqi Kurdish children from four different families stand in front of the abandoned house in Kirkuk, where they have lived since they were displaced in mid-October, 2017.

Photo: Melany Markham/NRC

## IRAQ

NRC has assisted 1.5 million people in Iraq so far this year, a key component being provision of food, water, NFIs and temporary shelter to people fleeing the battle in Mosul. Additionally, education and legal advice was provided to those who have been displaced, many of whom are likely to be displaced for months or even years to come.

NRC continued focusing its activities on responding to immediate needs following the many emergencies taking place throughout the country. NRC rehabilitated five damaged schools in East Mosul and handed these over to the authorities, benefitting 5289 children. A water network at Shalalat Junction (East Mosul) was rehabilitated, providing access to water for 450 households, while 120 shelters and one secondary school for Syrian refugees were built in Domiz camp in Dohuk. In Baghdad, NRC's **WASH/shelter team** distributed basic and supplemental NFIs to 3500 households and constructed 290 latrines in camps. In addition, 11 water treatment plants were rehabilitated as part of NRC's new operations in Ramadi. NRC's **education team** provided salary payments to voluntary teachers in 9 schools and trained DoE teachers and incentive workers on the "Better Learning Programme" approach. Additionally, 5000 children were enrolled in formal schools and 2700 children registered in non-formal education. Furthermore, 2252 vulnerability assessments were conducted in Ramadi and Fallujah to identify households eligible for **cash** assistance.

NRC's **Camp Management team** conducted a series of intra-site coordination meetings with relevant stakeholders and with women, youth, camp management support, and maintenance committees in camps in West Anbar. These consultations led to the installation of lighting fixtures throughout the site and connected 1,108 tents to electricity grids. The UDOC (Urban Displacement and Out of Camp) team is in development and it is envisaged that a full team will be in place by mid-December.

NRC has in this reporting period set up an **ICLA programme** in Ramadi where Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) have been conducted both inside and out of camps. Additionally, trainings in advocacy, Collaborative Dispute Resolution (CDR) and Housing, Land and Property (HLP) were conducted with customary justice actors and tribal and ethno-religious leaders in Ameriyat Al Fallujah (training in advocacy skills, CDR and HLP)



NRC Secretary General Jan Egeland visiting displaced families in Hammam Al Alil camp outside Mosul.

Photo: Alan Ayoubi/NRC



## SYRIA RESPONSE

September was the deadliest month for civilians in the whole of 2017. Syrians are being killed, wounded, displaced and besieged every day as the war rages on. Despite the narrative around de-escalation areas and truce agreements, civilians remain at severe protection risks and in need of humanitarian assistance.

NRC continues to respond to the needs of displaced and vulnerable people despite the challenging nature of the conflict. From July to September 2017, the Syria Response Office reached 112,450 new beneficiaries, bringing the total number of beneficiaries in 2017 at the end of September to 464,720, with an average of 2.4 services delivered to each person. These included **emergency response items** such as tents, blankets, hygiene products, cooking equipment and food, as well as more **transitional support** including housing rehabilitation, improving sanitation systems and working with food-insecure families to help strengthen their food production and income generating opportunities.

NRC are leading the way as a **voice of expertise on Housing Land and Property Rights (HLP)** in Syria. NRC have been providing displaced people with information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA) on HLP rights issues, including HLP procedural requirements and rights and how to exercise them. NRC also provides information on issues of legal identity and civil documentation.

NRC continues to bring some of the 5.8 million children and youth in need of education assistance **back to learning**, by reaching out in innovative ways including the Education in Emergency packs. NRC are committed to bring children and youth back to school, enhancing their education experience through supporting their **education pathways**.

NRC has designed a response to allow vulnerable displaced and conflict-affected populations to exercise their right to adequate housing. This **integrated intervention** includes WASH, ICLA, and Shelter (I-WISH) services that go beyond improving physical shelter conditions, to include addressing the other critical elements of community-based recovery. **I-WISH** aims to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable households and communities through the provision of upgrades and repair of sub-standard buildings in locations where considerations concerning HLP issues, access to services and risk of future conflict damage are adequately satisfied.



“School is very important, it’s much better than going out to work when you’re a child.” says Qamar, 12 from Aleppo. He has been out of school for the last two years and has attended NRC’s summer school.

Photo: Karl Schembri/NRC

## JORDAN

As part of an effort to support Syrian refugees to gain greater employment opportunities, NRC successfully hosted a job fair in Zaatari Camp in cooperation with ILO, the EU and UNHCR. The event was attended by over 50 national and international companies from across Jordan who advertised over 1,000 jobs. Additionally, NRC's **Livelihoods** team signed an agreement with GIZ in July to provide 2,800 Syrian refugees with Cash for Work opportunities in Jordan over the next two years. In Mafraq, the Livelihoods team is supporting local agribusinesses and producers with trainings in hydroponic farming and relevant inputs for the construction of greenhouses. After 2 harvest cycles, the participating households have produced 7000 kilos of cucumbers which have sold at 0.4 JD (\$0.56) /kg. This has generated an average income of 330 JD (\$464) for 6 households supporting 30 individuals. The team will continue to support localised agribusinesses in expanding their production and presence in the value chain, increasing job opportunities for economically vulnerable families in Mafraq.

In Azraq and Zaatari camps, the **Education** team finalised the Kitabuna project with the launch of the illustrated children's book 'Once upon a time in Zaatari and Azraq', an anthology of five stories written by Syrian refugees, which focuses on the positive aspects of life in the camps. The stories reignited the Syrian tradition of oral storytelling and were launched with the stories being told in the traditional style to a group of children aged 6-15 years. The stories are now being used in NRC learning centres and by a formal school in Amman to help improve children's reading.

In order to assist vulnerable Syrian refugees in the camps to cover their basic needs and cope with the harsh winter conditions, NRC distributed **cash** to refugees in Azraq camp. A second round of distributions focused on reaching vulnerable women in the camp. In addition to the winter preparations, NRC finalized the construction of 1991 kitchen units for the shelters in Azraq camp.

The **ICLA** team trained more than 200 Syrian and Jordanian community mobilisers. The training aimed at enabling participants to provide basic information to Syrian refugees about the importance of particular legal topics, and to identify cases in need of specialised counselling and legal assistance, and refer them to NRC.



This card reads: "So what if I'm a refugee? I'm a human!" Words from children were written on sheets of paper for parents and local community members to read in an event held by NRC's Education programme in Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan, to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism campaign

Photo: Hassan Hijazi/NRC

### LEBANON

NRC provided **emergency supplies** following the displacement of refugees caused by security operations in Aarsal. NRC is one of the few international organisations working in Aarsal, and was able to secure ongoing access during this time through strong relationships with the municipality.

As many Syrian refugees prepared to go back to school in early October, NRC worked with **education partners** across Lebanon to help increase enrolment. Through the national Back-to-School Campaign, NRC education teams went door-to-door and tent-to-tent in refugee communities to enrol out-of-school children in public education programmes in coordination with the Ministry of Education and Higher.

**Shelter, WASH, and Education teams** completed renovations on three public schools in North Lebanon. The rehabilitation work included the repair of bathroom and sanitation facilities, upgrades to meet the needs of the disabled students, waterproofing, painting, upgrading doors and windows, improving safety for playgrounds, and building new fences on the school grounds.

As part of NRC Lebanon's commitment to helping to improve crucial infrastructure in vulnerable Lebanese host communities, the WASH programmes in September commenced work to extend existing drainage network in the municipality of Bar Elias in the Bekaa Valley to help address winter flooding in a community that hosts thousands of Syrian Refugees.

Following violent clashes in the April and September in Ein El Helweh Palestinian refugee camp, NRC Shelter teams are taking part in interagency technical assessment of over 500 damaged or destroyed properties. **ICLA teams** joined the UNRWA assessment focusing on housing issues and related legal needs. NRC and UNRWA jointly developed the questionnaires and NRC ICLA staff supported the assessment on the ground. Once findings are consolidated, ICLA will provide the required legal assistance on identified legal issues.



NRC choir of Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian children. The choir is organised annually in Lebanon to promote peace, coexistence and tolerance.

Photo: Nadine Malli/NRC



## PALESTINE

Through its **ICLA programme** in the West Bank, NRC continued to work on 4,163 ongoing cases, providing legal assistance and counselling to approximately 45,067 people. Through collaboration with the Education team, ICLA activities revolve around improving access to schools and building the capacity of community mobilizers to promote rights within their own communities. 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 (including mediation and court representation through local partners).

The 'Improved **Education**' programme is undergoing an external evaluation across West Bank and Gaza to provide an in-depth assessment on the impact on educational engagement and learning outcomes.

An After Action Review (AAR) was carried out in the West Bank project 'Humanitarian support to protect Education from Attacks in MoEHE schools in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – Phase I' targeting 46 schools. The review provided a set of recommendations on how to strengthen the project as it enters its next phase. Research on the 'Better Learning Program' (BLP) collected qualitative data from students, parents, teachers and counsellors. Additionally, the new BLP manual/approach was piloted in MoEHE schools in Gaza.

With regards to **Shelter and WASH**, NRC continued to provide conditional cash for repair and upgrade of homes according to agreed minimum standards, including distribution of bedding kits and provision of hygiene promotion and hygiene kits.

**UDOC** (Urban Displacement Out of Camps) is building the capacity of local communities to effectively communicate and network during emergencies. This increases the resilience of these communities and strengthens the mechanisms for the provision of humanitarian service.



Children from Al Muntar Bedouin community in the West Bank risk losing their school should a demolition order be issued by the Israeli authorities.

Photo: Lys Arango

NRC **Lebanon's** work to help refugees from Syria who are unable to obtain a residency permit once they turn 15 years old has advanced through coordination with senior levels of government. In meetings with several Cabinet Ministers, officials have offered to take the matter forward, including a commitment to raise the issue at the Cabinet Committee on refugee issues. Likewise the Ministry of State for Refugee Affairs has been working with applicable departments in relevant ministries to advance the initiative.

NRC has also been working in cooperation with the Ministry of State for Refugee Affairs on a proposed amendment to the birth registration law which would allow Syrian refugees to register their children's births beyond the existing 12-month regulation. NRC's suggested changes to the amendment's language have been adopted by the Ministry, and the issue is currently before cabinet. If adopted, this change would help to address the potential backlog of hundreds of thousands of births of children of Syrian refugees in Lebanon that have not been registered.

Also in this quarter, modifications have been made to several administrative procedures regarding refugees' residency and civil registration requirements that are in-line with NRC's advocacy. A circular was issued to General Security Offices allowing Palestinian Refugees from Syria to use alternative forms of identification for children who have turned 15 years old to obtain a residency permit, a recommendation that is in line with one of NRC's core advocacy asks for all refugees from Syria. In addition, residency requirements for birth and marriage registration have been modified to alleviate the complications that many refugees face.

Lebanon **media work** focused on education in a [press release](#) reporting that more than 280,000 Syrian refugee children were out of school at the start of the new school year. "As the Syria crisis drags through its seventh year, more and more families are forced to send their children to work instead of school," NRC country director Kate Norton said.

In **Palestine** NRC focused on education under attack, issuing a [press release](#) about the destruction of three Bedouin schools in Area C just on the day when they were meant to reopen after summer recess. "Just when they were due to return to the classroom, Palestinian children are discovering that their schools are being destroyed," said the Norwegian Refugee Council's Country Director for Palestine, Hanibal Abiy Worku. "What threat do these schools pose to the Israeli authorities? What are they planning to achieve by denying thousands of children their fundamental right to education?" The press release was picked up by international media including [CNN](#) and the UK's [Independent](#) which followed up the story with the Belgian government's demand for compensation by the Israeli government. In a statement issued a day after NRC's press release, Belgium's deputy prime minister Didier Reynders and minister of development cooperation Alexander De Croo jointly condemned the demolition of the partly-Belgian funded structures. "These new demolitions and seizures of essential infrastructure are unacceptable: Belgium's projects aim to meet humanitarian needs and are carried out in strict respect of international humanitarian law," they wrote.

At the height of the electricity crisis in Gaza, NRC's advocacy officer in Gaza, Fedaa Al Ghussain, sent out a powerful [video diary](#) of life in the Strip that was picked up and hosted by the [Huffington Post](#), which provided an exceptional platform for dissemination via facebook shares and retweets.

NRC continues to lead advocacy efforts to promote unimpeded and sustained access to humanitarian assistance in **Syria**, including current efforts to ensure the **renewal of UN Security Council resolution 2165**, authorizing cross-border access for UN and its implementing partners, at a time when people remain severely in need.

Media and comms work inside Syria focused on out-of-school children, the Syria Response Office together with MERO produced a series of [video interviews and photo gallery](#) with displaced children who have missed out on school for years and who are now participating in NRC's education activities on the outskirts of Damascus. More than 1.75 million children are currently out of school – and for those fortunate enough to be in the classroom, the risk of dropping out is quickly rising. A group of children



participating in NRC's summer school were selected to be trained in filming and were handed out mobile phone so that they could film a day in their life, including going to work and attending catch-up classes. The videos were very well received on NRC's social media platforms.

NRC in **Iraq** kept its focus on the mass displacement caused by the military operations to retake Mosul, [Hawiga](#) and [Tal Afar](#) in the last quarter. While the Tal Afar operation was relatively short, NRC warned that hundreds of thousands of people still remained stranded, with nowhere to go. And although the Iraqi government declared that Mosul was completely retaken at the beginning of July, NRC warned that hundreds of thousands of people in the city were still in grave danger and called on the Iraqi government and the international community to prioritise the rebuilding of the destroyed areas, and ensure the safety of civilians. This is the statement as reported by [Reuters](#). At the start of the new school year, NRC also warned that among the hundreds of thousands displaced there were many children who have been out of school for more than three years suffering from [severe psychological distress](#).

NRC in Iraq hosted SG Jan Egeland and managed to get interviews published in Reuters, NRC's press release about the Secretary General Jan Egeland's visit to Iraq was picked up by Reuters, Rudaw and Alwatanvoice. Jan Egeland was quoted: "Failure to invest in reconciliation will leave hundreds of thousands displaced, desperate and disaffected. Leaders must do more to ensure reconciliation and dialogue over political and cultural divides." Alsharqiya TV broadcasted an interview with Jan Egeland about the situation in Iraq.

NRC also published a [press release](#) expressing concern over the fate of 1,400 foreign nationals, made up of women and children, who fled Tel Afar and were transferred from Hammam Alil to a prison in Tel Kaif. The press release got picked up by Reuters, AP, TRT, BBC Radio and World Service, News Night, ABC, Russia Today and many other international media outlets. Other press releases from Iraq dealt with civilians fleeing [Hawiga](#) and Western Anbar, and the [one year anniversary](#) of the start of the Mosul operation, raising attention to the fact that more than 50% of IDPs from Mosul may have lost their civil documentation and other official documents.

**Jordan** saw an improvement in Syrian refugees' status when the government announced it was issuing new work permits that would allow them to work in the construction sector. NRC was among the first to comment positively on this new measure. "The construction sector has a significant number of people working informally - without the necessary paperwork - which didn't give them the proper protection for payment and possible employer abuse," Elias Jourdi, shelter specialist for NRC, told Reuters. In another widely distributed story, AFP featured NRC's programme paying Jordanian landowners grants to help them build or renovate housing for Syrians.



Yadar is the head of an extended family who has been living in the Kilo 18 displacement camp in Anbar, Iraq for the last twelve months. A deceased uncle was a member of IS group and, as a consequence, the family is barred from returning home.

Photo: Melany Markham/NRC

## FURTHER READING

### **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](#)



Some homes in Mosul are beyond repair and will need to be completely rebuilt along with water and power supplies.

Photo: Melany Markham/NRC

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