

# NRC Middle East Quarterly Newsletter

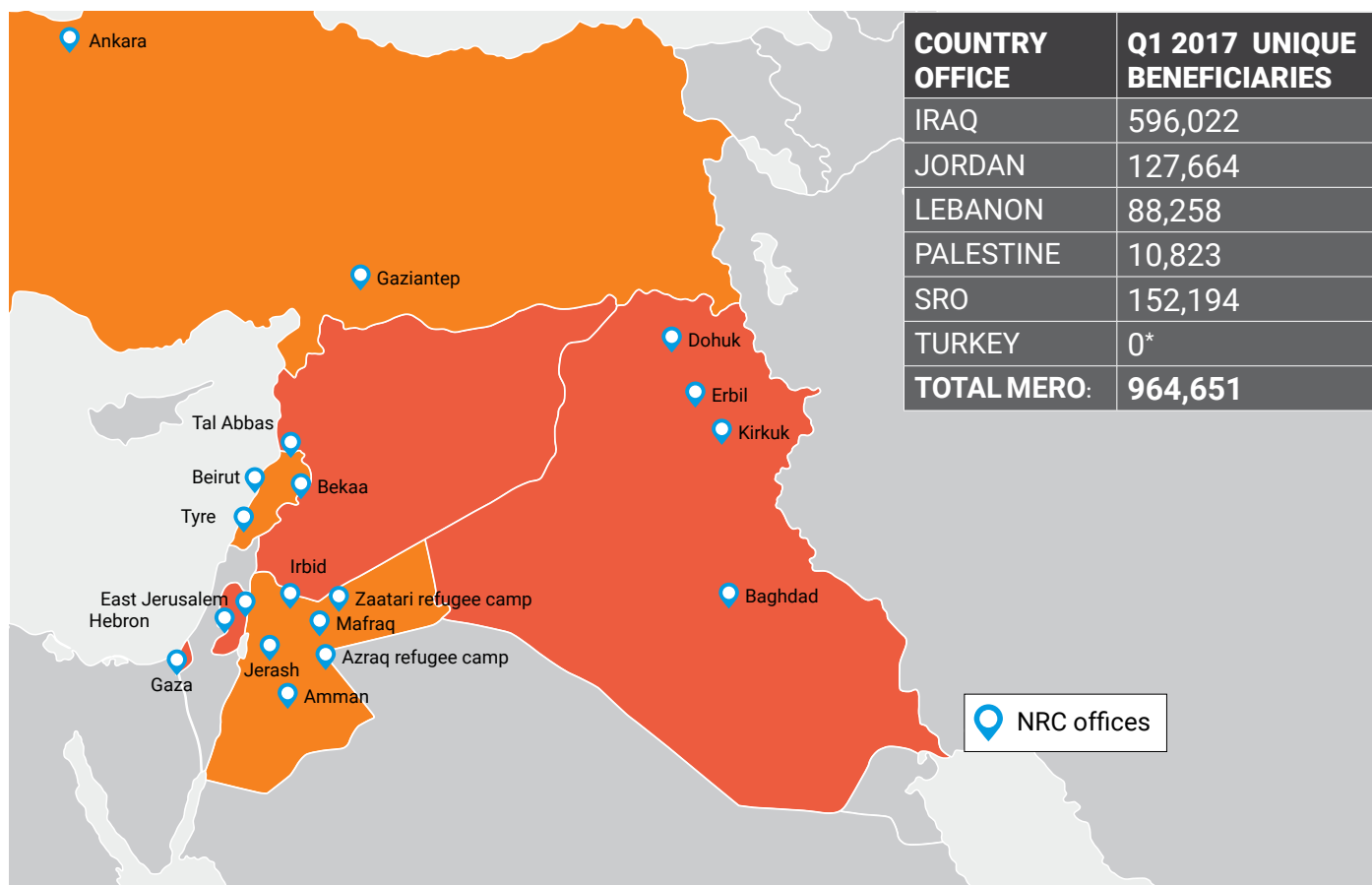
Quarter 1, 2017 in review



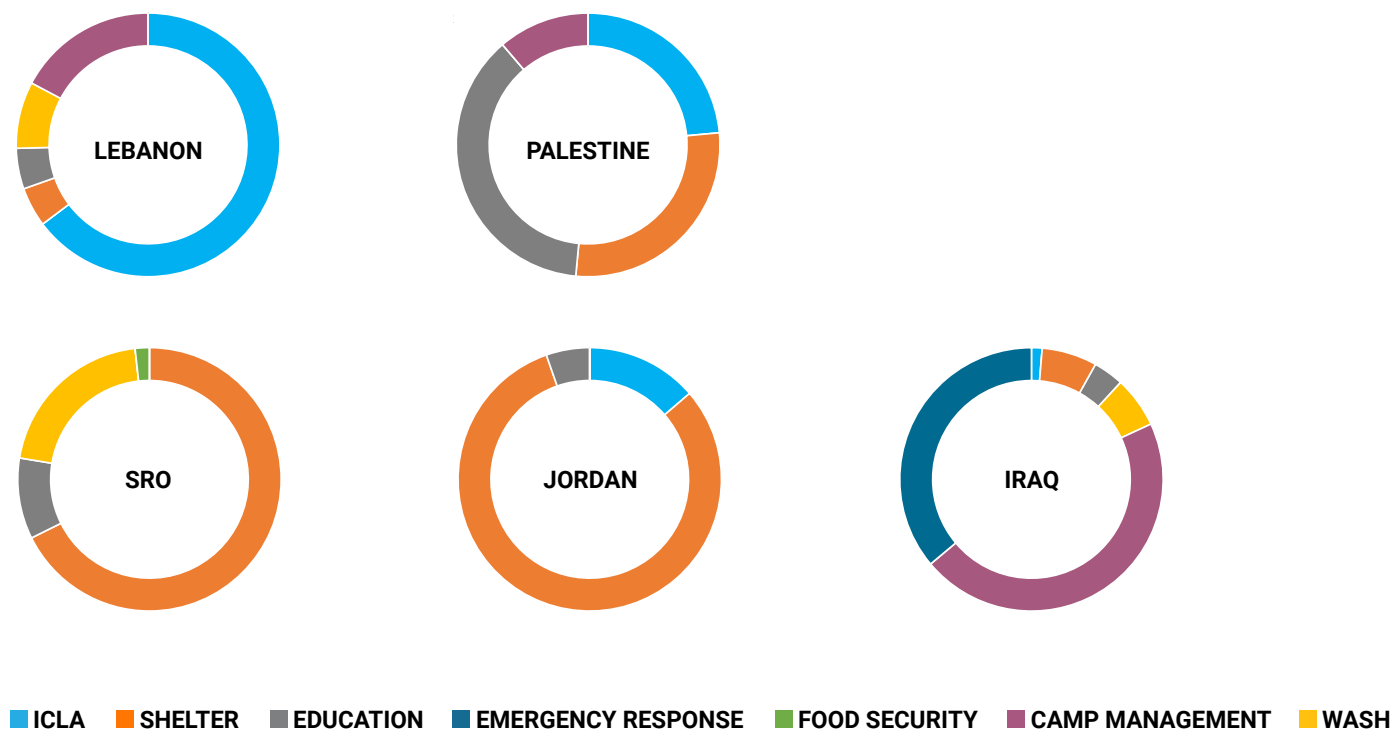
A young girl looks out the window of a bus as it arrives in the Hamam al-Alil camp for people displaced from Mosul.

Photo: Wolfgang Gressman/NRC

## UNIQUE BENEFICIARIES BY COUNTRY:



## BENEFICIARIES BY CC:



\*The first months of 2017 have been focused on recruiting staff, securing funding and forging partnerships. Providing NRC's registration in Turkey is renewed by the authorities, the targeted number of beneficiaries is expected to be reached during Q3 and Q4.

In **Iraq** over 3.4 million people have been displaced since 2014 and over 10 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance. The scale of the crisis has far outstripped the capacity of the Iraqi government to deliver the assistance needed, and the resources of local communities hosting displaced families are overburdened by additional populations and strained by the poor economic environment. More recently, the final push by the Iraqi security forces to retake Mosul from so called Islamic State (IS) group has caused possibly the largest wave of displacement since the beginning of the year. The conflict has now pushed the total number of people displaced from Mosul to close to half a million. Thousands of people have been temporarily accommodated in a transit site in Hamam Al-Alil; however, Iraqi authorities are transporting most people on to displacement camps in east Mosul.

March 2017 marked six years since the beginning of the war in the **Syrian Arab Republic (Syria)**. Prospects of a sustainable political solution remain unlikely in a conflict that continues to have staggering humanitarian consequences for the civilian population. Early 2017, 13.5 million Syrians required protection and humanitarian assistance and an estimated total of 6.3 million people were internally displaced in the country. Active conflict persisted with repeated attacks against civilian populations and infrastructure, including medical facilities. Nearly 650,000 people were living in 13 areas under siege by the end of January, without access to regular humanitarian assistance. As a result of an escalation of hostilities, border crossing points located in the north and south of the country were temporarily closed. International coalition led military operations against the IS group, especially in Raqqa governorate, raised significant concerns for the protection of civilians. Against a backdrop of protracted conflict, a collapsing economy and eroded community cohesion, IDPs are gradually running out of options to meet their basic needs and many have become almost entirely dependent on aid. In the last quarter, concerns around the protection of Syrian humanitarian workers who have delivered critical assistance in Syria increased, particularly in areas where conflict lines shifted.

**Jordan** continues to host large numbers of displaced people in formal and informal settings. In efforts to formalise access to employment opportunities, more than 40,000 work permits were issued to Syrian refugees by March 2017, of which 1,949 were issued to women. The majority (80%) of women's issued work permits are in the agriculture sector through the cooperatives scheme, and the exemption of work permit fees for Syrian refugees was extended until December 2017. A rapid data gathering exercise conducted by NRC in Informal Tented Settlements in Mafraq confirmed that the majority of refugees settled there because of work opportunities in agriculture. Although the majority are registered with the Ministry of Interior, very few applied for a work permit. Working informally leaves them vulnerable to exploitation, human trafficking and threats of deportations by farm owners. Involuntary relocations to Azraq camp continue to be high, with 24% more relocations in March 2017, compared to March 2016. The majority of involuntary relocations occur from Amman, mainly because Syrian refugees have overstayed their leave permits or left the camp informally.

**Lebanon** has the highest number of refugees per capita in the world and 71% of Syrian households in Lebanon continue to live below the poverty line, 52% below the extreme poverty line. As the crisis continues, refugees' coping mechanisms, money and assets have been exhausted. 17% live in Informal Tented Settlements, the remaining live in urban and semi-urban areas, many in sub-standard buildings. Lack of legal residency places strict limitations on refugees to move freely, earn a livelihood, and to access education and core humanitarian services. In February 2017, the Government of Lebanon announced a waiver of the \$200 annual residency renewal fee for some Syrian Refugees. While positive, the fee waiver only applies to refugees with valid UNHCR registration and not to those who have obtained residency by means of sponsorship, have been de-registered, or to Palestinian refugees from Syria. Ultimately, a large proportion of the 1.5 million refugees in Lebanon will not be able to avail of this fee waiver.



In **Turkey**, the first months of the year have been marked by a heated political context leading to the April referendum. The Government of Turkey's victory on April 16 paves the way for the ruling party to amend the Turkish constitution and consolidate power in the presidency. Meanwhile, the number of Syrian refugees under temporary protection in Turkey grew to nearly 3 million. Less than 10% of Syrian refugees live in 22 official camps along the Syrian border, while the remaining 90% reside in host communities – mostly in the southeast, with more and more in Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara and other cities to the north and west – putting increasing strain on infrastructures and basic services. March 20th marked one year since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. This agreement sharply curtailed the flow of refugees and migrants into Europe. According to UNHCR, the number of people who arrived in Greece by sea ticked up slightly, from 1,089 in February to 1,526 in March. During the same period, the working environment for humanitarian operations in Turkey has been impacted by the rolling crackdown of the Turkish Government, leading to uncertainties over the ability of INGOs to continue operating in the country.

The first three months of 2017 saw an unprecedented upsurge in the obstruction of delivery of humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable communities in Area C of the West Bank in the **Palestinian territories**. NRC and its partners reported an increased number of incidents in which humanitarian assistance intended to benefit communities, at risk of demolition of homes and forcible transfer, was seized or destroyed, leaving vulnerable communities without access to basic shelter, livelihood or water and sanitation. In the Gaza Strip, the ongoing obstruction of personnel and humanitarian aid as a result of the blockade and land closure of Gaza continues to cause delays for delivery of vital humanitarian services. The siege has resulted in chronic aid dependency and unemployment rates among the highest in the world. Extreme fuel shortages in 2017 have resulted in power outages of up to 20 hours a day and compromised the provision of critical basic services to Gaza's 1.9 million residents.



Abu Allaith, is a former Arabic teacher from Syria. He is now one of the most active members of the parents involvement group in the We Love Reading campaign run by NRC in Azraq Camp. He dedicates his time and effort to enlighten the children and organise reading sessions.

Photo: Lian Saifi/NRC

## IRAQ

NRC Iraq continues to respond to the Mosul displacement crisis, establishing **a new Mosul area office** as teams respond to the immediate needs of the displaced, through the provision of services of all NRC Core Competencies in Iraq. Many of those who have fled are living outside displacement camps and attempting to support themselves by tending to livestock or living with relatives. In March, NRC distributed cash to 100 displaced families and who were living in informal settlements around Hamam Al-Alil camp. NRC has additionally provided lifesaving assistance to over 200,000 people displaced by the ongoing conflict in the area since February. In May, we continued to provide assistance to displaced people, distributing sleeping mats to those temporarily housed in the camp, as well as scaling-up water-trucking to ensure households have access to water as temperatures begin to climb into the 40°Cs.

With funding from Canadian Government's Peace and Stabilisation fund, NRC Iraq has launched a new project on Strengthening Customary Justice and Peacebuilding Efforts in Areas of Return, and Advancing the Civil Rights of Returnees in **Ninewa and Anbar governorates**, under the umbrella of our information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA) programmes. This initiative recognizes that customary justice actors who work with the government to implement the legal system in Iraq are trusted by the Iraqi population, and play a key role in resolving disputes related to housing, land and property rights (HLP). It focuses on building the capacity of such actors to ensure that all invested in the justice system can collaborate productively to ensure returnees can claim their civil documentation and access HLP rights.

The new **SIDA and NMFA Programme Approach** has allowed NRC the flexibility to respond as needs arise, in line with the Iraq Country Strategy.



May Hadaya, from NRC Iraq's legal counselling team, at an information session for displaced people in Hassan Sham Camp. She said: "I am doing my best with my teams to get them necessary documents that will help people get the services they need when they return home or while they are displaced."

Photo: Melany Markham/NRC

## SYRIA RESPONSE

In Syria, the **ICLA** Programme carried out two large assessments on housing, land & property rights and civil documentation in opposition controlled areas in southern and northwest Syria. The data from this exercise has been used to design the ICLA response and was shared with relevant organisations and coordination mechanisms. The assessment reports will be launched in May. NRC is developing short sector guidance notes such as birth notification for health providers working in South Syria and HLP due diligence for organisations working in informal settlements and camps in northwest Syria.

In February, the Syria Response Office engaged a consultant for three months to strengthen **camp management** principles in NRC's existing Shelter, WASH (water, hygiene and sanitation), and ICLA programmes. Training was provided to NRC's teams in northeast and south Syria and included modules on the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in a camp response, community participation, and modalities for engaging out of camp populations. NRC teams learned how to set up IDP-led management structures, with the south team taking steps to include the learning outcomes in its collective shelter response. The consultancy is also helping to shape NRC's future engagement in Camp Management and Urban Displacement Out of Camps (UDOC) programming.

Since the beginning of the year, NRC has been implementing an **integrated Shelter & WASH response** to support Iraqi refugees and Syrian IDPs in Al Hole Camp in Hasakeh, northeast Syria. Initial response activities included the provision of temporary shelter, NFIs, temporary water and sanitation facilities and hygiene promotion. The NRC team is now in the process of transitioning to longer-term infrastructure and service provision in order to meet the needs of the affected population.



Alaa, 14, from Daraya, attends the Centre for children in Sahnaia on the outskirts of Damascus. Alaa said: "I come to the centre to learn, to strengthen my knowledge." NRC has been supporting the centre since June 2016, providing student backpacks and supplies, teaching materials, teacher training, and providing administrative support to the association.

Photo: Karl Schembri/NRC



## JORDAN

NRC provides **information and counselling** on access to work permits to support Syrian refugees in entering the formal labour market. In order to expand this intervention, a partnership agreement was signed with Tamkeen, a local NGO working on increasing awareness of refugees and employers regarding Jordanian labour law, striving for the elimination of workers' human rights violations, and combatting human trafficking. Further facilitating access to livelihoods, NRC launched a youth program in Irbid. Working with both Syrian and Jordanian youth, and in partnership with community based organisation, NRC provides short courses in life skills, employability skills, IT skills, entrepreneurship and recreational activities. Following the courses, NRC will support youth to **access employment opportunities**.

The **Education Program** in camps established walking routes to formal schools, ensuring that children arrive safely. This is facilitated by volunteers who conduct exercises from the Better Learning Program on the way. NRC now also works with formal schools in camps to refer children vulnerable to drop out to NRC learning centres for remedial support.

NRC will be partnering with Action Against Hunger (ACF) for the implementation **of a new WASH project in Irbid** to improve access to water for vulnerable Jordanians and Syrian refugees. The project is contracted by ACF and funded through the MADAD Fund. The project aims to reach 10,000 households with water connections, upgrades to WASH facilities, and hygiene and water conservation awareness.



Salah and Khaled sitting around a gas heater distributed by NRC with ECHO funding, to keep themselves warm in their caravan in Azraq refugee camp in Jordan.

Photo: Hussein Amri/NRC

## LEBANON

NRC Lebanon developed a new **Basic Literacy and Numeracy curriculum** for out-of-school children, based on the Lebanese curriculum which includes life skills training and psycho-social support activities. This program was initiated in remote areas in South Lebanon where refugee children have not been able to access public schools, and will be rolled out country wide over the coming months. NRC Lebanon also began providing **School Readiness classes** for pre-school refugee children in order to prepare them for enrolment in formal public schools. Children are taught basic Arabic, a foreign language, mathematics and psycho-social support in a playful, recreational way. This initiative is included under the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education's initiative Reaching All Children through Education (RACE).

In February, NRC's **ICLA** teams facilitated a **mobile Sharia court session** in the North Bekaa to process proof of marriage and kinship cases for refugees. Refugees' lack of legal residency documentation, fear of being arrested or detained at check points, and the lack of financial means, severely limit refugees' ability to travel freely. Therefore, mobile courts that operate in areas where refugees live, reduces these risks and allow refugees to access essential justice and legal documentation services.



This is Youssef outside his tent in Bar Elias in the Bekaa Valley. After being evicted three times since he fled to Lebanon in 2014, he and his family, are tired of not being able to get a sense of stability and safety in their everyday life. "The worst part of being a refugee is that you never have time to settle down before you have to leave again. Sometimes, I think it would be so much easier if we go back to Syria, even if there is still fighting and no safety at least then we would be in our country. My biggest hope is that peace will prevail in Syria so that we can go home."

Photo: Racha El Daoui/NRC



## TURKEY

The first quarter of 2017 marked the start of NRC Turkey's multi-sector programme covering ICLA, Livelihoods and Education across three different provinces. As part of this, NRC entered into a partnership with the Association for Solidarity with Asylum-Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) – a reputable Turkish NGO with nation-wide coverage and high levels of acceptance both among target groups and relevant authorities.

NRC also collaborated with Ankara University in the development of a curriculum for its informal **education** programme that is designed to allow Syrian refugee children a pathway into the formal Turkish education system. Other education activities are currently pending approval from the relevant authorities.

In support of the **ICLA** programme, preliminary agreements were reached with key stakeholders regarding referrals, and with local Bar Associations regarding capacity building of lawyers in specific areas relevant to NRC's target groups. Meanwhile, NRC has identified interventions aimed at ensuring safe and adequate housing as a gap in the response and is preparing to scope out programmatic opportunities in the field of Housing, Land & Property rights and security of tenure.

Furthermore, the **vocational training** pilot project in Ankara came to a successful close with the graduation of over 1,000 participants. Beyond skills development, the project helped promote social cohesion between communities and the participation of women (who made up 57% of the course). Courses included computer maintenance, sewing, hair dressing, welding and professional translation. Meanwhile, a labour market assessment and skills profiling exercise are underway to inform additional **livelihoods** opportunities, which will go beyond vocational training to include private sector engagement and pro-active job matching and mentoring services for training graduates.



Syrian youth getting welding training in Ankara. The Vocational Training Program run by NRC and two local education institutes in Ankara is a four-month project funded by the GIZ to sustain quality education and promote skills development opportunities for Syrian refugees and host communities impacted by the humanitarian crisis.

Photo: NRC

## PALESTINE

In 2017, NRC strengthened its partnership with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) to develop crisis management plans to support students, teachers and staff of MoEHE to prepare, plan and respond in the event of renewed crises in Gaza. NRC also agreed with MoEHE to implement NRC's **Improved Education (IE) and Better Learning Programme (BLP)** projects in 80 new schools across Gaza. NRC signed two new partnership agreements with local organizations in Gaza and the West Bank, to set up five libraries and establish parental clubs and to provide psychological support to teachers and counsellors delivering the BLP psycho-educational activities in target schools.

Through the **ICLA programme**, NRC and its partners in the **West Bank**, managed over 3,300 legal cases and reached over 2,000 Palestinians with information and legal counselling. NRC, with partner organization Yesh Din, successfully petitioned for the evacuation and dismantlement of an illegal settlement outpost and for the return of private Palestinian property in the villages of Silwad, Ein Yabrud and Taybeh to their rightful owners. In Gaza, ICLA continued to assist displaced and vulnerable Palestinian women and men to access housing, land and property rights to improve their security of tenure. Legal counselling was provided to over 200 and legal assistance to over 500 beneficiaries, with a dedicated focus on raising awareness of these rights amongst women.

NRC's **Shelter, Water and Sanitation (WASH)** programmes in Gaza repaired nearly 500 housing units for extremely vulnerable households in the first three months of 2017, and provided winterization kits including blankets and mattresses to 200 households. NRC also worked with the authorities to upgrade WASH infrastructure in Gaza and began upgrading of two public schools, to serve as Designated Emergency Shelters (DES) for up to 1900 people during crises.



A Bedouin Palestinian child walks by his father's livestock sheds in Wadi Al Jimel. Situated in Area C, they are threatened by forced evictions to expand the nearby roads towards an illegal settlement called Maale Adumim. "We're facing the problem of forced evictions and expulsion from our land," the child's father, Moussa, said. "If they remove us from here, that's our death sentence." NRC is assisting them with legal aid and representation at the Israeli courts and authorities.

Photo: Karl Schembri/NRC



NRC's advocacy work focused on the major **Brussels conference on the Future of Syria**. The April event brought together important government and donor representatives to discuss concrete ways to support the people of Syria, including those displaced by the six-year conflict within the country. Ahead of the conference, NRC released data from recent surveys on the situation of refugees and civilians internally displaced in Syria. NRC research also highlighted how challenges related to insecurity of tenure, forced eviction, disputes, and lack of documentation is worsening the humanitarian impact of the war on civilians inside Syria and poses serious obstacles for future early recovery. In the North-West of Syria, **87 percent of displaced Syrians indicated that civil documentation was necessary to access humanitarian services**. 60 percent of those surveyed said that civil documentation was required for children to access school, while 57 percent said that it was necessary to move around. Restrictions on freedom of movement due to lack documentation is of a particular concern as it might also prevent civilians in Syria from fleeing to safe locations.

In addition to discussing the post agreement planning around reconstruction and returns, the April 2017 Brussels conference focused on progress made, lessons learned and challenges since the February 2016 London Conference. As the international community met to discuss how to address the regional crisis, NRC pressed governments and international donors to show renewed political will to respond to the needs of Syrian refugees by ensuring that refugees' rights to **legal stay and other protections** are respected. While some progress has been made over the past year, **as many as 80 percent of refugees from Syria in Lebanon lack valid legal residency documentation (compared to 70 percent in August 2016)**. More than **20 percent of Syrian refugees in host communities in Jordan still lack valid residence and/or registration**. This makes them vulnerable to arrest, detention, and even deportation. The lack of valid residency or formal registration often entails significant limitation on the freedom of movement for refugees, which hinders their ability to access work and basic services, including schools.

NRC was able to actively participate in several sessions during the conference, including through **a high level panel on humanitarian access**, which included **NRC Secretary General Jan Egeland**. We were pleased to see that many of the issues raised during the Brussels conference reflected our concerns. NRC will continue to work with our partners to push for concrete implementation of the conference outcome documents and related commitments made by donors and governments in relation to the protection of the rights of refugees as well as civilians in Syria.



On 5 April, NRC issued a press release ahead of the Brussels conference on “Supporting the future of Syria and the region”, warning that refugee returns and reconstruction were being discussed prematurely. The release generated significant media interest, including an interview with Secretary General Jan Egeland on [CNN's Amanpour](#) programme, [Al Jazeera Arabic](#) interview with regional director Carsten Hansen, as well as AP interview and Radio France Internationale interviews with Syria response director Thomas White.

For the 6th year commemoration of the Syrian conflict, NRC produced a successful photo story from Jordan comparing refugees' current situation with their lives before the conflict. This struck a chord with communities on social media and gained significant interest. Additionally, the press release published on 13 March was picked up by news wires Reuters and AP, ensuring a good distribution of our message quoting Regional Director Carsten Hansen, noting NRC's outrage and concern at the continuing plight of the Syrian people. NRC was additionally represented in live interviews with Syria director Thomas White on TRT, LBC Radio (UK) and Radio Al Balad (Jordan) with Haifa Hourani from the Jordan country office, who attended spokesperson training hosted by the regional office earlier this year.

Throughout the first quarter, Iraq remained in the media spotlight due to the Mosul response, generating interviews and press coverage on global media outlets such as [CNN](#), [LA Times](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [USA Today](#), [Al Jazeera's Inside Story](#). The Iraq team also participated in a successful interview on the BBC News Live online Facebook channel at Hammam Al Alil Camp with NRC's Ahmed Azzam, as the Middle East Regional Office supported with interviews from Jordan on [Al Sharqiya](#) and [Al Arabiya](#).

The military operation to retake western Mosul on 19 February triggered a new press release, with media pickup ranging from Al Jazeera to Al Arabiya, AFP and the Sunday Telegraph. NRC is still receiving daily requests for interviews on the humanitarian situation in Mosul as the military operation continues. The NRC Iraq team has been on the ground collecting images and video footage which have been widely shared with international media outlets. This remains an important part of NRC's public awareness work, ensuring the international community receives regular updates on the humanitarian situation surrounding in Mosul and the surrounding areas.

The Lebanon office has actively promoted a story on the forced eviction of approximately 10,000 Syrian refugees from the Bekaa Valley throughout the month of April to various media outlets, which is also being followed up throughout May. The advocacy and media team in Lebanon have highlighted the importance of this situation, briefing journalists, arranging field trips and interviews, to ensure a continued focus on the story, with NRC Lebanon's advocacy head Mike Bruce noting: “We really want to be sure that the evictions are not used as a backdoor to forced returns to Syria”. Significant coverage of our work in Lebanon was published on [Reuters](#), [Daily Mail](#), [Middle East Monitor](#), [Svenska Dagbladet](#), [Le Figaro](#), and [Radio Slovenia](#).

A [Facebook Live event](#) was hosted by the Iraq communications team in displacement camps outside of Mosul. This was the first event of its kind from the field for NRC, and reached more than 8,000 people organically, with [interviews from NRC staff](#) and [footage from the camps](#).

### Palestine

[Palestine country office fact sheet](#)

[Improving children's wellbeing - An evaluation of NRC's Better Learning Programme in Palestine](#)

[Perspective: If you are a 10-year-old living in Gaza](#)

[FAQs on Main Legal Issues in East Jerusalem](#)

[Legal Memo: The Absentee Property Law and its Application to East Jerusalem](#)

### Lebanon

[Lebanon country office fact sheet](#)

[Lebanon: Refugee children become breadwinners](#)

[Evaluation: Improving living conditions for vulnerable Syrian households in Aarsal, Lebanon](#)

### Turkey

[Turkey country office fact sheet](#)

### Syria Response

[Syria Response office fact sheet](#)

[Syrian refugees' documentation crisis](#)

[Briefing note: Syrian refugees' right to legal identity: implications for return](#)

[Report: Reflections on future challenges to Housing, Land and Property restitution for Syrian refugees](#)

[Sitting exams, despite war](#)

[Statement on the Brussels conference on Syria](#)

### Jordan

[Jordan country office fact sheet](#)

[Report: Youth assessments, Zaatari and Azraq Camps](#)

[Heater distribution in Azraq Camp](#)

### Iraq

[Iraq country office fact sheet](#)

[Principled Humanitarian Assistance of ECHO Partners in Iraq](#)



School-aged Iraqi children are taught Arabic, English, Maths and Science, in addition to enjoying recreational and psychosocial activities in NRC's School Support Centre in Debaga camp, Iraq.

Photo: Elias Abu Ata/NRC

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