

NRC Middle East Quarterly Newsletter

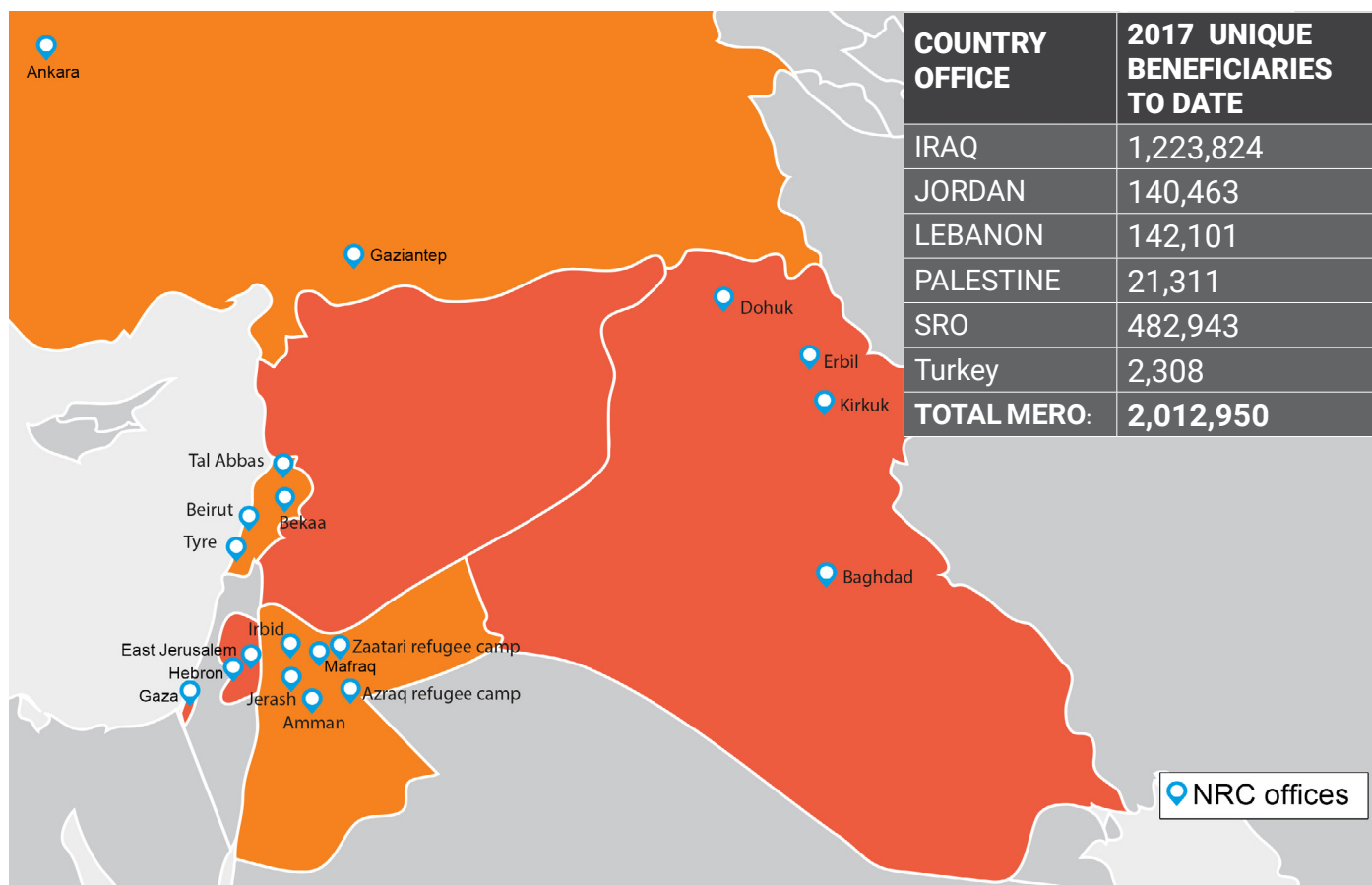
Quarter 2, 2017



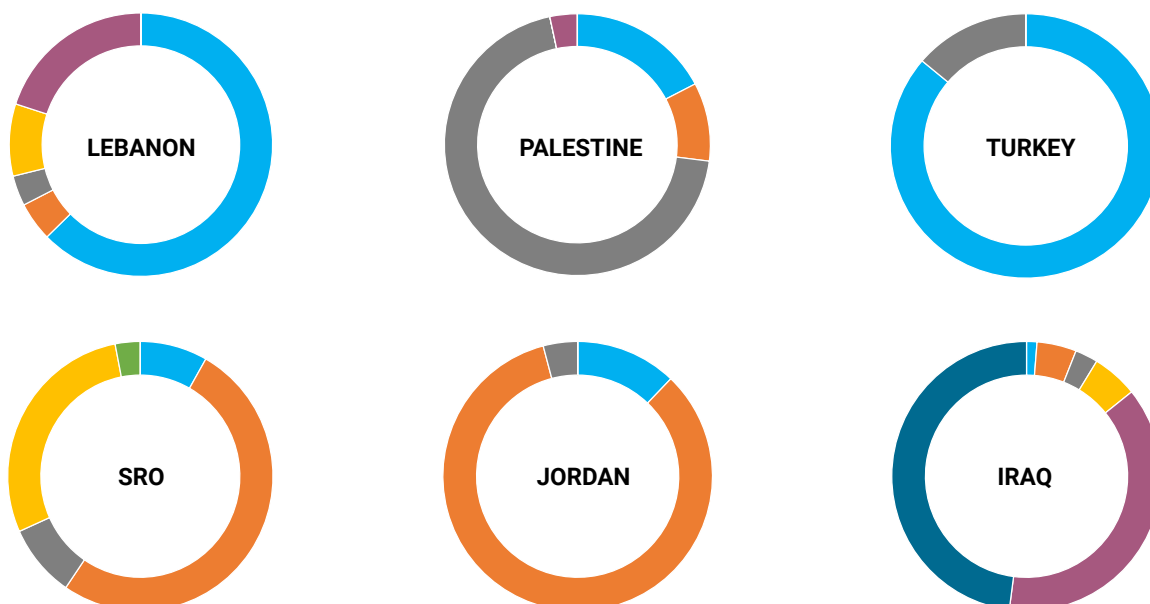
The district of Ramadi in Anbar which was retaken by Iraqi forces in December 2015.

Photo: Wolfgang Gressman/NRC

UNIQUE BENEFICIARIES BY COUNTRY:



BENEFICIARIES BY CC:



■ ICLA
 ■ SHELTER
 ■ EDUCATION
 ■ EMERGENCY RESPONSE
 ■ FOOD SECURITY
 ■ CAMP MANAGEMENT
 ■ WASH & UDOC (URBAN DISPLACEMENT OUT OF CAMPS)

Nearly nine months after the offensive to re-take **Mosul** from the Islamic State (IS) group began; Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Al Abadi declared 'victory' in mid-July as Iraqi forces moved through the last sections of west Mosul's Old City. The fighting displaced around 900,000 people, left roughly 32,000 houses destroyed and according to recent media reports, as many as 40,000 people lost their lives. Over 70,000 people have returned to re-taken neighbourhoods of west Mosul, although it is expected that significant numbers of IDPs will remain in protracted displacement due to the levels of destruction in the west of the city to property and infrastructure.

In north-eastern **Syria**, the fourth stage of the Euphrates Wrath Operation against the IS group was launched by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Raqqa governorate in April, with the aim of retaking Raqqa city. The escalation in violence and shifting of frontlines has led to the displacement of over two hundred thousand people and serious protection issues faced by IDPs continue to be reported, in particular around restrictions of movement deriving from the implementation of screening and sponsorship procedures. On the 4th of May 2017, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey signed a 'Memorandum on **the creation of de-escalation areas** in the Syrian Arab Republic'. The creation of these de-escalation areas are described as a temporary measure of 6 months to be renewed with the agreement of the guarantors. Targeted areas are mainly Idlib province, certain parts of the north of Homs province, eastern Ghouta and Dar'a and Quneitra provinces. Opposition groups and the Government of Syria have not been associated with the initiative. Following the announcement, a significant decrease of conflict activity in Aleppo governorate (western countryside) and Eastern Ghouta was recorded. There is also a reduction in conflict in Der'a. In contrast, an escalation in hostilities has been registered in Idlib.

The **Jordanian** government is continuing efforts to formalize access to employment opportunities for Syrian refugees. By the end of May, close to 52,900 work permits were issued to Syrian refugees, of which 2,470 (5%) to women. The Ministry of Labour signed an MoU with the Jordan General Federation Trade Union (JGTFU) that outlines the process through which the JGTFU will start issuing work permits for Syrian refugees in the construction sector. This will allow refugees to formally work in the sector, without being tied to a single employer. This policy change presents opportunities for NRC Jordan to link its ongoing urban shelter programme to formal livelihoods opportunities for Syrian refugees in the future.

Following months of negotiations, **Lebanese** political parties have agreed on a new electoral law that mixes proportional representation with Lebanon's existing confessional representation system. As a result of this agreement, elections that were originally slated for May 2017 are now expected to be scheduled for May or June of 2018. Parliament had already extended its term from their original mandate of 2014. During the second quarter a mass eviction of refugees living in the Bekaa Valley has had serious impacts on thousands of families living in informal tented settlements. There are increasing concerns about future evictions alongside increases in tensions between refugees and host communities. In June the Lebanese Armed Forces launch a security operation in the Aarsal area in North Bekaa following reports that militants were fleeing Syria to the mountainous border region. Hundreds of Syrian refugees were detained in the operation with subsequent reports of human rights abuses. There have been reports that some refugee leaders in the area have requested a facilitated return to Syria. At the end of the quarter, the LAF and non-state armed groups were preparing for a wider military operation in Aarsal.

Turkey continues to experience political tensions following the failed coup attempt of July 2016. The country has since remained in an official state of emergency, as the government continues efforts to purge the state of suspected coup-plotters. In parallel, the opposition to the ruling party organized the so-called "Justice March", which started in Ankara and culminated with a rally gathering several hundreds of thousands of protesters in Istanbul in early July. Meanwhile, the number of refugees, migrants and asylum

seekers registered in Turkey has continued to grow with about 3.4 million individuals, including over 79,000 newly registered in June. More than 3 million are Syrians. The remaining 315,643 are nationals primarily from Afghanistan and Iraq. According to UNHCR, 31,226 Syrian refugees spontaneously returned to Syria in 2017, 20,314 of whom returned from Turkey. To date in 2017, nearly 9,300 people crossed from Turkey to Greece by sea, a sharp decrease compared to the last six months of 2016. Under the framework of the EU-Turkey Statement, five rounds of returns took place in June for 48 people (all adult single males), bringing the total number of people re-admitted to Turkey to 1,229 since the Statement came into effect in March 2016. During the second of the year, the working environment for humanitarian organizations in Turkey remained challenging. Some organizations faced detention and/or deportation of staff; others have been banned from the country.

The on-going stalemate between **Israel and Palestine** regarding the Middle East Peace Process greatly impacts the humanitarian context in Palestine. It remains to be seen what impact, if any, strategies put forward by the US Trump Administration will have. In the shadow of this stalemate, the humanitarian protection crisis has continued to deteriorate and the coercive environment that prevails in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has become entrenched, punctuated by policies and practices of population displacement and annexation of Palestinian land by Israel. In Gaza, the 10-year long blockade and the critical schism between the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority and the Hamas administration has resulted, inter alia, in a crippling energy crisis, which has severely swelled the already dire humanitarian needs there. These needs include a 58% unemployment rate among youth and 33,000 individuals who are still displaced as a result of the 2014 hostilities. In East Jerusalem, controversial security measures imposed by Israeli authorities on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount complex, following the shooting of two Israeli border police at the site, have triggered an upsurge of protests and hostilities across the region as Palestinians perceive such measures as a threat to the status quo of the holy site.



Displaced Iraqi children are playing football in Shekhan camp, Duhok.

Photo: Alan Ayoubi/NRC

IRAQ

Within this reporting period, the focus has been to respond to immediate needs of the displaced population from **Mosul**. With funding received from ECHO, UNHCR and SIDA, NRC therefore positioned itself to respond immediately by providing information on transportation and essential services through ICLA (information, counselling and legal assistance) programming, as well as by providing clean drinking water at mustering points. As temperatures reached over 40 degrees Celsius, the immediate provision of water was considered a priority. In Hamam Al Alil, the main screening site receiving the majority of the displaced from west Mosul, NRC has continued to work in the transit site and Hamam Al Alil 2 camp, providing camp management services, **Rapid Response Mechanism food and water packages**, and **WASH** and **ICLA** services. This location, given the large number of displaced passing through the site, and the high level of militarization, remains complex and challenging. NRC has taken a leadership role in engaging with military actors to continue to secure access and maintain the humanitarian nature of the sites.

Whilst displacement is ongoing from West Mosul, internally displaced people (IDPs) have also begun to return to East Mosul. It is recognized that efforts needed to bridge ethnic, sectarian and other social divides include confidence-building measures ranging from shared community initiatives for different groups, to educational and social activities for girls and boys. Returnees and 'stayees' frequently encounter damaged or destroyed infrastructure and property; limited access to electricity, water, and municipal services; continued insecurity; and tensions and mutual suspicions among families. NRC has focused its activities in responding to immediate needs – providing **water** (water trucking and rehabilitation of water schemes), **cash** (provision of immediate support) and **shelter** in East Mosul and Northern Mosul (Telkaif district), accessed via NRC's Dohuk office. The displacement dynamics in Iraq remain fluid, characterised by waves of return, secondary displacement, and displacement from urban areas back into camps due to lack of resources. Amongst this backdrop, a protracted IDP & Syrian refugee caseload remains in camps across the country, many of which NRC continues to respond to with **shelter, education, and GBV** (gender based violence) programming.

In South-Central Iraq, **NRC opened an office in Ramadi in May**, which will help to reach people seeking shelter in camps west of the city. As the largest INGO in Iraq, NRC continues to leverage its position and expand its footprint by collaborating closely with cash consortium. Through this relationship, a two year, \$24 million consortium proposal for recovery and return has been submitted to MADAD. The overall objective is that conflict-affected households benefit from increased confidence in their economic future and economic and social stability. NRC has proposed to create a social safety net by supporting the rehabilitation of damaged shelters and enabling community members to understand and exercise their rights in accessing civil documentation, as well as their rights to housing and property (including establishing legal ownership and pursuing compensation and restitution).



NRC met Eliaf, 12, during an art exhibition which was held at NRC's School Support Centre for students who attends classes and recreational activities. Eliaf participated in the exhibition by showcasing a house that she created.

"I wish I could have a house like this," Eliaf says.

Photo: Sarhang Sherwany/NRC

SYRIA RESPONSE

As conflict and displacement go on unabated, safe and adequate access to basic services such as water, electricity, markets and education remains insufficient. NRC has supported community service infrastructures in Syria through the **Quick Impact Projects (QIP)**. For example, NRC and representatives from the targeted communities have recently selected and rehabilitated water wells in Syria. NRC has successfully integrated components of social cohesion and participatory approach into its QIPs. Through a participatory approach, the community is involved in decisions as to which community infrastructure should be rehabilitated, creating a sense of ownership and sustainability. Similarly, social cohesion is key as it builds trust between and within communities, and helps mitigate any tension that may arise, thus assuring adherence to the principle of Do-No-Harm.

As part of its humanitarian response in camps and informal settlements, NRC has conducted work in a number of sites in which **NRC's Shelter/WASH** teams are planning interventions. Part of this work includes specific due diligence activities in order to protect beneficiaries' Housing Land & Property rights with a view to ensuring that their tenure is secure and they would not face forced eviction or exploitation. This process seeks to achieve legal certainty about buildings/land rights and reduce risks of eviction and potential disputes.

SRO's Food Security activities in Q2 focused on a range of responses to address emergency food needs. NRC prepositioned 12,500 emergency food rations in anticipation of increased vulnerabilities among the populations. NRC is also preparing for **multipurpose cash interventions** to the most vulnerable populations and has launched cash-for-work activities to provide income-generating opportunities and enable vulnerable households to meet basic needs and develop strategies for accessing livelihood opportunities.



Children learning the alphabet by cutting out letters and colouring them at a summer school in Sahnaya, on the outskirts of Damascus. NRC organised the summer school programme for more than 2,000 children in six different schools in and around Damascus.

Photo: Karl Schembri/NRC

JORDAN

In response to the opening up of the **Livelihoods** sector in Jordan, NRC signed an MoU with the Jordan Chamber of Industries (JCI), which represents 35,000 private sector members across the country. The cooperation aims to facilitate information sharing between NRC and the market, and to improve youth access to safe, legal and sustainable employment. In June, NRC cooperated with JCI to place 24 graduates from its air conditioning mechanics courses for youth in Zaatari camp with a private company in northern Jordan. Similar placement activities are currently ongoing for 200 NRC trained tailors.

The **Education** team finalized a consultancy to develop an educational curriculum to address the needs of Syrian and Jordanian children who need remedial support, and are at risk of dropping out of the formal schools. The materials will be used in various project activities, including in NRC's Summer School programme in July-August. In cooperation with UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, NRC is also exploring options for implementing the Drop-Out programme, which provides a combination of life skills, and basic literacy and numeracy skills for Syrians and Jordanians aged 13-19 years who have dropped out of formal education.

NRC Jordan continued to develop a community based approach to implement sustainable programmes. This includes cooperation with more than 20 community based organizations to improve access to refugees in hard to reach and underserved areas, and to facilitate a better understanding of community needs. An external consultant drafted a report to provide an overview of intra- and inter- community dynamics between Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities. The information in the report is used to implement the community based approach and identify community mobilizers, who will be trained by the ICLA team in the coming months to enable them to best promote the rights of refugees within their communities.



A group of men working in the carpentry workshop in Za'atari refugee camp. Syrian refugees receive training on carpentry, painting, and blacksmithing and then, NRC helps them find employment opportunities inside and outside the camp.

Photo: Elias Abu Ata/NRC

LEBANON

In April, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) ordered an evacuation from a 6 x 9 kilometer radius of the Riyak Air Base, affecting over 10,000 refugees. No alternative options were identified and refugees were left to make their own arrangements. The situation was complicated by many area municipalities refusing to admit additional refugees and strict limitations on freedom of movement.

In response to the eviction order, NRC emergency response teams provided **protection monitoring, emergency shelter and WASH assistance** in cooperation with Inter-Agency Coordination agencies. NRC has provided emergency one-time cash grants of \$300 per family for 151 affected families with funding from SIDA, with UNHCR coordinating cash assistance for a total caseload of 557 vulnerable households. In addition, NRC's advocacy efforts resulted in NGOs receiving formal representation on the Inter-Agency Evictions Task Force in the Bekaa.

As part of the **Community Support Projects**, NRC completed work on a water tower funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that will provide a reliable water supply for 5,000 residents of the Qasmieh Palestinian Gathering. Palestinian "Gatherings" are communities of Palestinian refugees that have been built outside of established camps and as such do not receive infrastructure assistance from UNRWA. Working in close cooperation with municipal governments, Community Support Projects such as this water tower provide crucial water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure to communities in Lebanon that have come under increased strain as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis.

A new curriculum for the Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN) Programme was rolled out nationwide in Lebanon during the quarter. A consortium including NRC, Save the Children and IRC designed the 8-month programme, created new learning materials for Arabic, English, Math, French, and life skills lessons, and led teacher training sessions. BLN classes are intended for school-aged children who have never been in school or do not have the required basic learning skills to attain basic literacy and numeracy skills that will allow them to either attend Accelerated Learning Programmes or to enrol in formal schools.



Following an eviction order for over 10,000 Syrian refugees living in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley in April, NRC distributed water storage tanks to provide a clean water supply to those displaced.

Photo: Youssef Zeineddine/NRC

TURKEY

As part of NRC's **Livelihoods** programme, a labour market assessment covering Ankara and Gaziantep was completed. The report reflects on existing skills levels and work experience among the refugee population as well gaps in the labour market and barriers to employment. The report's recommendations will inform the focus of vocational training (TVET) activities scheduled for quarters three and four. Additionally, and in preparation for the TVET courses, Turkish language courses for Syrian participants began during the reporting period.

NRC's partnership with Ankara University resulted in the finalisation of a curriculum for its informal **education** bridging programme, designed to facilitate a transition into the formal Turkish education system. Rollout of the bridging programme, however, is on hold pending necessary approvals from relevant authorities. Meanwhile, NRC has designed an alternative set of activities which help out-of-school refugee children develop Turkish language, literacy, numeracy, and life skills through recreational activities, thereby also contributing to psychosocial well-being and social cohesion.

Through its partnership with Turkish NGO ASAM, NRC's **ICLA programme** conducted door-to-door information provision and legal counselling activities for Syrian refugees across Ankara, Konya and Gaziantep. Areas of focus included registration, tenancy rights and civil documentation. Furthermore, NRC and DRC finalized a jointly commissioned Protection Context Analysis, the main findings of which will be shared with key stakeholders in Q2.

As described above, NRC's registration in Turkey expired at the end of May 2017. Pending renewal, and in line with prevailing regulations, NRC suspended its directly managed programme activities, with some of its local partners and contractors ensuring a level of continuity until NRC's registration is renewed. The process is moving forward, and NRC is confident that operations will be able to resume soon.



Syrian youth getting hands-on computer training class 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

NRC Palestine have recently signed new funding agreements with the Danish, Irish and the French Governments who joined the West Bank Protection Consortium.

Through its **ICLA** programme in the West Bank, NRC continued to work on 3,714 ongoing cases and has adopted an additional 94 new cases, providing legal assistance and counselling to approximately 26,000 people. Through collaboration with the **Education team**, ICLA activities support 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 team additionally supports reconstruction efforts, ensures community awareness of HLP issues, and engages in capacity building of legal practitioners, community leaders and NGO actors working on these issues.

The **Education** programme in the West Bank has finalised a consultancy for the capacity-building of staff and has renewed their MoU with the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) for another year. The MoEHE have further decided to appoint NRC as the main addressee for legal interventions for the most vulnerable schools in the West Bank. In Gaza, NRC is conducting summer camps for children, while 65 trained seconded counsellors have been deployed to 65 MoEHE-targeted schools to provide psychosocial support to affected children. NRC research into the Better Learning Programme (BLP) in Education in Emergency settings is also ongoing in collaboration with the University of Tromsø, Norway.

With regards to **Shelter and WASH**, NRC continued to provide conditional cash for repair of homes, and WASH emergency response preparedness in Gaza. **UDOC** (Urban Displacement Out of Camps) continued to build the capacity of local communities to enhance their resilience through enhancement of field-level coordination and emergency preparedness at the community level.



Children attending the primary school in Jubbet Al Dhib in the West Bank found they have no classrooms anymore. Their school was demolished on the night of 22 August, 2017.

Photo: Brona Higgins/NRC

In **Lebanon**, NRC has engaged significantly on the issue of residency and work permits for refugees in the country. NRC had advocated that refugees should be able to obtain legal residency status through a simple and consistent process that does not incur a fee. Ideally, these processes should not push refugees towards sponsorship, which can be a pathway towards exploitation and abuse. In March 2017, the Ministry of Interior issued an order to General Security Offices allowing Syrian refugees that are registered with UNHCR to renew their residency visa without having to pay the \$200USD annual renewal fee. While the limited fee waiver is a positive move, there are ongoing issues with regards to limitations in applicability and limitations to the consistency of application of the order. UNHCR estimates that a maximum of 320,000 refugees will be able to benefit from this fee waiver.

In April the Lebanese Armed Forces ordered an eviction of all refugees living in Informal Tented Settlements surrounding the Riyak Air Force base in the Bekaa Valley, where over 10,000 refugees were affected. Interagency Coordination oversaw the response, with NRC providing protection monitoring and shelter and WASH support. In addition, NRC in coordination with LHIF and other NGOs was able to secure NGO representation on the Evictions Task Force established in the Bekaa Valley.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) released a revised paper “Access to Work for Syrian refugees in Lebanon Policy Recommendations for a Win-Win Solution” which featured several NRC contributions, language, and recommendations regarding residency and legal stay issues faced by refugees. NRC consulted and contributed to the paper which will form the basis of ILO’s policy recommendations to the government regarding livelihood options for Syrian refugees.

As regards the **Syria response**, NRC took a leading role in drafting an inter-agency private briefing note highlighting protection concerns in the context of the military operation in Ar-Raqqa governorate and city, led by Syrian Democratic Forces with the Global Coalition’s support. The note underlined protection issues and the grave physical risks faced by civilians remaining in Ar-Raqqa city, emphasising increasingly limited options for exit and restrictions on freedom of movement. Recommendations were presented and discussed during a series of briefings with relevant stakeholders, including several members of the Coalition, both in the region and at capital level. The note was well received and contributed to the identification of concrete follow-up points, such as the elaboration of a lessons learned document to be shared with civil-military actors and guidance documents on main protection issues (underway).

NRC was actively engaged in collective advocacy efforts and participated in developing a coordinated advocacy strategy within the **Syrian INGO Regional Forum (SIRF)**. Key advocacy priorities identified by NRC including access to humanitarian aid; protection of humanitarian workers and the promotion of principled humanitarian assistance, are now reflected in this inter-agency strategy and will benefit from collective efforts.

In July, NRC co-hosted an event with UNHCR to present the findings of two major HLP and civil documentation NRC assessments undertaken in non-government controlled areas in the North and South of Syria. The briefing was well attended by UN, donor, embassy, INGO and NGO representatives. The reports from the two assessments were then widely distributed to key stakeholders and have been well received.

Throughout the second quarter, NRC has maintained a leading media presence from **Iraq**, where the final stages to retake the city of Mosul from the IS group led to significant displacement and humanitarian needs. 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. Some of the most influential global media featured NRC's messages, including [the Los Angeles Times](#), [Financial Times](#), [Al Jazeera](#), a further Al Jazeera piece, [The Guardian](#), AFP, and [the Daily Mail](#). Additionally, [ABC Australia](#) produced a piece on NRC's media coordinator, Melany Merkham, working in Iraq.

In marking 50 years of Israel's occupation of **Palestine** and 10 years of blockade of Gaza in June, NRC disseminated a press release and multimedia collected from the West Bank and Gaza. Secretary General Jan Egeland visited Palestine, met with beneficiaries and field staff, and held a press conference from East Jerusalem. As part of their coverage on the occupation, [The Guardian](#) quoted Egeland saying "Two generations have already lived under occupation and in mounting disillusionment and despair. Both Palestinian and Israeli children are denied a future in peace and security."

In **Lebanon**, NRC covered the previously mentioned evictions from the Bekaa Valley which was reported on by [The Times \(UK\)](#), as well as [the Washington Post](#). The Lebanon office also pushed a feature story through [Reuters](#) on the vocational training given by NRC to Syrian refugees, which received significant media attention internationally.

The second quarter also saw the beginning of the assault on **Raqqa**, displacing thousands of Syrian civilians fleeing IS controlled areas and airstrikes against the group. NRC has continued to brief journalists covering the battle about the dangers and protection issues civilians are facing. In July, [NRC produced a video](#) on the challenges of Syrian children in sitting their exams, despite the ongoing conflict. Published during the exam period, this video called on all actors to ensure safety of children during this critical stage in their education. It was the top viewed video on NRC's website in terms of reach (with 99,207 views) and engagement (with 1,577 people who liked or commented on the video).

2017 also marked the 5th year of operations of the Zaatari Refugee Camp in **Jordan**. NRC compiled and distributed [a media package](#), including [video](#) and images collected from the camp, as well as various infographics. Numerous media outlets, including [NRK Norway](#), [ABC Nyheter](#) and [Malta Today](#) picked up the story, documenting the evolution of the camp over the last five years. Additionally, the Italian magazine [L'Espresso](#) published an extensive feature, facilitated by NRC, in which the organisation features highly.



Maya, is one of the legal field officer at NRC's office in the Bekaa Valley.

She assists in developing the understanding of the legal concepts, laws and practices regarding civil documentation, legal stay and housing, land and property rights.

Photo: Brona Higgins/NRC

Palestine

[Palestine country office fact sheet](#)

Lebanon

[Lebanon country office fact sheet](#)

Turkey

[Turkey country office fact sheet](#)

Syria Response

[Syria Response office fact sheet](#)

Jordan

[Jordan country office fact sheet](#)

Iraq

[Iraq country office fact sheet](#)



Ibtehal wrote a story about wool balls. The story was inspired by the cold days in Azraq camp.

“The idea of the story is to make children open their eyes to any child who needs help. Sometimes there are people in need of help, but we don’t pay attention to them.” Ibtehal said.

Photo: Hassan Hijazi/NRC

Rights Respected, People Protected