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Humanitarian action for refugees and migrants in countries in North Africa and the Middle East

Report¹

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

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Summary

The humanitarian situation of refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons is extremely serious in many countries in North Africa and the Middle East, which is a prime transit region for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers hoping to enter Europe. Many of these people risk their lives on the Mediterranean Sea and in dangerous transit countries along the southern Mediterranean coast or on the Atlantic Ocean heading towards the Canary Islands.

National parliaments debate and approve national budgets including financial aid to foreign countries. Most parliaments have bilateral or regional contact groups with foreign parliaments. Humanitarian assistance by member States sometimes lacks close co-ordination among European donor countries and receiving countries. The Parliamentary Assembly is therefore in a key position to raise awareness among its individual members and their parliaments and promote concerted European action.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 14654](#), Reference 4419 of 21 January 2019.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes with deep concern the serious humanitarian situation of refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons in many countries in North Africa and the Middle East. This part of the world is a prime transit region for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers heading towards Europe, many of whom risk their lives on the Mediterranean Sea or in dangerous transit countries along the southern Mediterranean coast or on the Atlantic, crossing to the Canary Islands of Spain.
2. The United Nations (UN), the African Union and the European Union are working to improve the humanitarian situation together with many private charities and non-governmental organisations and an enormous number of volunteers. Their work depends largely on political support and financial aid provided, amongst others, by member States of the Council of Europe, frequently pledged at international donor conferences. However, not all these pledges are fully implemented.
3. The Assembly regrets that humanitarian assistance by member States sometimes lacks close co-ordination among European donor countries and receiving countries, thus leading to regional inequalities in the provision of humanitarian assistance as well as less effective aid. Some countries receive more attention than others which can have serious humanitarian consequences. Such regional disparities put further pressure on migrants and refugees, causing them to move on into other countries.
4. National parliaments debate and approve national budgets including financial aid to foreign countries. Most parliaments have bilateral or regional contact groups with foreign parliaments. The Assembly is therefore in a key position to raise awareness among its individual members and their parliaments and promote concerted European action. Through its relations with parliaments having the status of partners for democracy, and relations with other parliaments in North Africa and the Middle East, the Assembly has a unique possibility to promote a constructive dialogue on the humanitarian situation and needs of migrants and refugees in this region at the parliamentary level.
5. The budget of the Council of Europe does not comprise funds for financial aid to non-member States, but Algeria, Cape Verde, Morocco and Tunisia are members of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe in Lisbon, which aims to facilitate democratic political transition and helps to promote good governance and reinforce and enlarge Council of Europe regional action in combating trans-border and global threats. In addition, there are a growing number of conventions of the Council of Europe that countries in Africa and the Middle East are invited to sign, including for example the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197) and the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (ETS No. 30).
6. The Assembly highly appreciates the central role of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as well as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee of the UN and non-UN stakeholders active in humanitarian assistance, under the leadership of the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. National humanitarian aid should be provided in the framework of such co-ordinated and targeted action for individual countries concerned and respond to the need assessments established. In this context it is important that member States and their parliaments closely co-operate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), including with their field offices in the countries concerned.
7. Member States should assess, together with UNHCR and IOM, the humanitarian needs identified in refugee and other camps and accommodation, including for internally displaced persons. The most vulnerable persons in these places should receive priority aid and protection against migration related violence, in particular sexual violence and human trafficking.
8. Referring to its [Resolution 2323 \(2020\)](#) "Concerted action against human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants", the Assembly calls on member States to support the safety and security of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East. In co-operation with UNHCR and IOM, human trafficking must be eradicated from the camps.
9. Referring to its [Resolution 2299 \(2019\)](#) "Pushback policies and practice in Council of Europe Member States" and [Resolution 2228 \(2018\)](#) "Human rights impact of the "external dimension" of European Union asylum and migration policy: out of sight, out of rights?", the Assembly recalls the need to improve mechanisms for relocation and resettlement obligations of member States to ease the migratory pressure in Middle East and North African countries. The Assembly emphasizes the fact that facilitating resettlement

2. Draft resolution adopted by the Committee on 12 March 2021.

throughout Europe is key for fairer burden sharing and helps mitigate the unacceptable humanitarian situation for migrants and asylum seekers in Europe's bordering countries. The Assembly also reiterates that frontline member States should also receive greater support and solidarity taking into account the burden they have to deal with. Furthermore, the Assembly notes that providing legal pathways for migration helps reduce the risk of pushbacks in the Mediterranean and protects the lives and rights of asylum seekers.

10. Welcoming the voluntary return programmes for rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants, run by the IOM, which provide individual aid for reintegration, the Assembly calls on member States to take into account the additional humanitarian assistance needed in this context, for the countries of origin as well as host or transit countries in the region.

11. Recalling its [Resolution 2214 \(2018\)](#) "Humanitarian needs and rights of internally displaced persons in Europe", the Assembly emphasises that the humanitarian situation of internally displaced persons in North Africa and the Middle East requires more attention and support. Particular attention should be given to arbitrarily displaced persons, the majority of whom, in these regions, are displaced within their own country.

12. Aware of the additional challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Assembly recalls its [Resolution 2340 \(2020\)](#) "Humanitarian consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for migrants and refugees". Member States should not reduce their humanitarian aid for migrants and refugees in other countries, in particular in North Africa and the Middle East. They should try to increase humanitarian aid in order to reach the targets under the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, they should facilitate remittances by migrant workers and diaspora which contribute to meeting the humanitarian needs of the recipients in North Africa and the Middle East.

13. The Assembly notes that humanitarian situations differ widely in countries in North Africa and the Middle East, requiring more targeted humanitarian aid and assistance for migrants and refugees. In this regard, the Assembly recommends that member States pay particular attention to the following situations:

13.1. Countries on the North African shore of the Mediterranean host large numbers of Sub-Saharan migrants, many of whom are workers. Under the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, however, the economic recession has reduced employment opportunities for migrant workers in these countries, leading to problems. These countries are also transit hubs for irregular migration and migrant smuggling to Europe and in particular the European Union, including from their own nationals. To deal with these two situations, greater aid is required both for migrants as well as for asylum seekers. More work is also required to set up and run efficient asylum systems in a number of these countries, with the support of UNHCR. Furthermore, the European Union has a role to play, including through human rights compliant bilateral agreements.

13.2. Countries in the Middle East have a long tradition of hosting migrant workers from neighbouring countries. Through the armed conflicts in Libya and Syria, very many persons have become refugees or internally displaced persons. Although high numbers have returned to their countries and homes, the general situation in these countries still require major humanitarian support including in the context of ongoing security issues and the Covid-19 pandemic.

13.3. Terrorism has affected many countries in North Africa and the Middle East, leading to security risks and additional hardship for migrants and refugees in the region, many of whom have become victims of terrorism. While terrorism makes humanitarian action by the international community in these countries dangerous and difficult, it also means that more assistance is required to protect the whole population, whether locals, migrants or refugees. When humanitarian assessments are made, they should pay particular attention to specific needs arising from terrorist threats.

13.4. Countries which have readmission agreements for irregular migrants require additional support for their reintegration. The same applies for voluntary return programmes for migrants and rejected asylum seekers. Member States should assess and provide the additional humanitarian aid required for these returnees and the communities to which they belong.

14. The Assembly calls on the member States parliaments to ensure a parliamentary dimension in all decisions concerning the provision of humanitarian assistance for migrants and refugees in North Africa and the Middle East. Inter-parliamentary co-operation within the Assembly could also play an important role in this context, involving actively partners for democracy as well as the African Union in devising policies for the humanitarian needs and human rights of refugees and migrants.

15. Welcoming the work of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe over many years, the Assembly invites member States to work much more with the Centre, including on the most pressing humanitarian needs of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in North Africa and the Middle East.

16. Recalling that several countries in North Africa and the Middle East are members of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), the Assembly invites those countries to review their national legislation regarding migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in accordance with human rights and international refugee standards.

B. Draft recommendation³

1. Referring to its Resolution ... (2021) "Humanitarian action for refugees and migrants in countries in North Africa and the Middle East", the Parliamentary Assembly emphasises the importance of member States providing humanitarian assistance for this region. The human suffering experienced by refugees and migrants in North Africa and the Middle East pushes many of them to risk their lives on often deadly routes to Europe over the Mediterranean Sea or through equally dangerous land routes, falling prey to human traffickers and smugglers.
2. The Assembly welcomes the presence of the Council of Europe in Tunis and Rabat through offices that have been opened there. It also welcomes the work of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe in Lisbon. Many countries in North Africa and the Middle East have signed conventions of the Council of Europe and co-operate in relevant partial agreements such as the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the Co-operation Group to Combat Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Drugs (Pompidou Group).
3. In the Assembly, Israel has observer status and the parliaments of Jordan and Morocco as well as the Palestinian Legislative Council have the status of partners for democracy. Other parliamentary delegations participate regularly in committee meetings and Assembly sessions.
4. With this institutional framework of co-operation across the Mediterranean Sea, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers take action to improve the situation of refugees and migrants in countries in North Africa and the Middle East by reinforcing its action in this region, in close co-operation with the European Union and the African Union, in particular by:
 - 4.1. inviting more countries in North Africa and the Middle East to co-operate in action against human trafficking in the framework of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197);
 - 4.2. developing projects focusing on refugees and migrants, in particular through the Council of Europe offices in Tunis and Rabat and expanding the role of the North-South Centre.

3. Draft recommendation adopted by the Committee on 12 March 2021.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Lord Alexander Dundee, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Armed conflicts, terrorism, serious human rights violations and natural disasters have resulted in more than a hundred million people needing humanitarian aid to survive. Worldwide, nearly 80 million people are forcibly displaced.⁴ Within this group, women and children remain the most vulnerable.
2. This alarming situation has led colleagues and myself to table a motion for a resolution (Doc. 14654), initiating this report. While the Council of Europe is not an organisation which delivers humanitarian aid, national parliaments have the power to approve national budgets including funds for humanitarian aid, either under bilateral frameworks or through multilateral organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU). Therefore, the Parliamentary Assembly can and should look at humanitarian action.
3. The Mediterranean Sea has been a major route for migrants and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa trying to reach the European Union, with changing numbers of persons who succeeded over the past years.⁵ Countries in the Middle East and North Africa and their crisis situations hence become very important for all member States.
4. The poor humanitarian situation of migrants and refugees in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa aggravate their conditions and frequently compel them to use those countries as mere transit countries. In order to improve the situation, a country-by-country analysis is necessary as well as an identification of the crises which displace so many persons.
5. Most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic brought severe suffering to many countries, interrupted humanitarian assistance from being delivered across borders, and heavily affected national budgets in virtually all countries worldwide, thus potentially leading to reduced possibilities for international aid in the future.
6. For Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is of particular importance due to its geographical proximity. Conflicts in the region, as in Yemen, Syria and Libya, are affecting their own population, but also have an impact on the whole region due to the massive influx of migrants and refugees. Up to 85% of displaced persons are hosted in developing regions. Although Covid-19 infections in the MENA region have not reached the high European and American figures, growing poverty in a global recession could lead to more people leaving their homes, exacerbating the situation further.
7. Our committee visited Amman (Jordan) in March 2018 to examine the situation of refugees and migrants in the country and to exchange views with the Jordanian authorities. More than 650 000 Syrian refugees live in Jordan, and the majority of them are still in need of humanitarian aid.
8. I had hoped to visit relevant countries and hear from experts working in the field, but the Covid-19 pandemic paralysed travel and made such preparatory work impossible. Therefore, I am particularly grateful to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for their written briefing notes and their participation in our meetings.
9. This report analyses the current humanitarian situation in the MENA region regarding migrants and refugees and seeks to inform Council of Europe member States on possible future priority action for refugees and migrants in the different countries concerned.
10. Countries of the region are no longer just countries of transit for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, they have also become, increasingly, countries of destination. Refugees and asylum seekers frequently do not receive the support needed. In addition, most countries in the MENA region have high numbers of migrant workers, many of whom work in precarious situations or have lost their work due to the pandemic and economic recession.
11. MENA countries with readmission agreements for irregular migrants require specific assistance for returned migrants, including when returnees are from third countries. Humanitarian assistance should be part and parcel of voluntary and assisted return programmes.

4. www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5ee200e37/unhcr-global-trends-2019.html.

5. www.iom.int/sites/default/files/capture2.jpg.

12. Considerable differences exist in the MENA region and require a closer geographic analysis of relevant data, in order to decide on adequate and focused humanitarian assistance. While some countries produce considerable financial revenues from natural resources and trade, many are affected by conflicts, terrorism and other challenges to the rule of law. These differences need to be taken into account.

2. Humanitarian situation of refugees and migrants in North Africa and the Middle East

13. In this chapter, I will try to identify the particular situations and needs of countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

Morocco

14. Morocco is a major transit country for migrants trying to reach Spain, with 40 326 sea arrivals and 1 535 land arrivals in 2020, among them some 4 000 Moroccan nationals.⁶ Experts estimated there to be some 700 000 Sub-Saharan migrants living in Morocco in 2019, mostly from Senegal and the Ivory Coast as well as Cameroon and Guinea, but also from Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁷ As of 31 October 2020, UNHCR Morocco registered 7 790 refugees and 4 868 asylum-seekers, approximately half of them from Syria.⁸

15. Morocco is also increasingly becoming a major country of destination for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. It was the first country in the Middle East and North Africa region to launch a National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum, setting out mechanisms of response to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers on the Moroccan territory. The UNHCR has worked closely with the country and in its country evaluation report on Morocco for 2016 to 2019,⁹ it described its strategy, namely to (i) register refugees in conjunction with the authorities; (ii) provide humanitarian assistance and protection to refugees in co-operation with Morocco's national immigration and asylum strategy; (iii) strengthen the institutional capacities of national actors involved in the field of asylum; and (iv) establish durable solutions for refugees by focusing on socio-professional integration, voluntary repatriation or resettlement in a third country for the most vulnerable. Morocco's efforts as well as those of the UNHCR in this area need to be recognised and supported further.

16. Following on from earlier programmes, the European Union provided Morocco with a specific programme of €101.7 million to deal with irregular migration in 2020.¹⁰ While the EU Council gave the European Commission the mandate to establish a readmission agreement for irregular migrants with Morocco in the year 2000, such an agreement has not yet been concluded.¹¹ In February 1992, Morocco and Spain signed a bilateral readmission agreement.

17. The Council of Europe has an office in Rabat. Morocco is a member of the North-South Centre, of the Co-operation Group to Combat Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Drugs (Pompidou Group) and of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission). The Parliament of Morocco is an active partner for democracy with the Assembly.

18. Morocco is a host country for work migrants from the Sub-Sahara and other regions in Africa affected by economic problems linked *inter alia* to the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, a high percentage of migrants trying to enter Spain or Italy are Moroccan citizens. Therefore, the Council of Europe should assist Morocco's efforts to work for social rights and against human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Closer co-operation with Spain, Italy and the European Union should be supported.

Algeria

19. Algeria hosts approximately 90 000 refugees from the Western Sahara region in five camps located in the south-western part of the country and some 9 000 refugees and asylum seekers in the capital.¹² The conflict in the neighbouring Western Sahara region started with fighting with the Polisario Front in the 1970s over Morocco's claims to this territory. Since 1991 peacekeepers for the United Nations Mission for the

6. <https://migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/northern-africa>.

7. www.migrationpolicy.org/article/growing-destination-sub-saharan-africans-morocco.

8. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/morocco>.

9. www.unhcr.org/5e1f058d7.pdf.

10. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_19_6744.

11. www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-000331_EN.html.

12. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/7039>.

Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) have monitored a ceasefire agreement.¹³ MINURSO has a budget of US\$56 million and is mostly staffed by nationals from Bangladesh, Egypt, Ghana, Pakistan and the Russian Federation, with 10 duty stations in the Western Sahara region and one in Algeria.¹⁴

20. From January to September 2019, 2 900 Algerian citizens arrived as refugees or migrants by boat in Spain and 800 in Italy.¹⁵ In 2020, a significant increase of boat migrants departing from Algeria was observed¹⁶, with 1 380 Algerian boat migrants arriving in Italy.¹⁷

21. The EU Council mandated the European Commission to establish a readmission agreement with Algeria in 2002, with no success so far.¹⁸ The bilateral Swiss-Algerian agreement on circulation and readmission entered into force in November 2007,¹⁹ and the readmission agreement between the United Kingdom and Algeria dates from 2010.²⁰

22. The EU maintains an informal dialogue with Algeria on migration and provided assistance to Algeria under the European Neighbourhood Initiative which has a budget framework of between €108 million and €132 million for the period 2018-2020.²¹ Under the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, Algeria is also eligible for funds.

23. According to the UNHCR, Algeria is lacking a comprehensive national asylum and protection framework.²² The UNHCR is thus planning to help establish a mechanism for the referral of asylum-seekers.

24. Algeria is a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) with considerable oil and gas resources.²³ It is a country with a high risk of terrorist attacks, mainly from Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other regional Islamist groups including Al Murabitun and Daesh-affiliates.²⁴

25. Algeria is member of the Venice Commission and the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe.

26. Given the high percentage of Algerian boat migrants trying to enter Spain and Italy and the fact that Algeria is affected by the neighbouring conflict in the Western Sahara region, closer co-operation with Spain, Italy and the European Union might help improve the living conditions of work migrants and Algerian boat migrants who returned to Algeria.

Tunisia

27. In Tunisia, the UNHCR counted 4 447 asylum seekers and refugees in April 2020.²⁵ The UNHCR has appealed for funds of US\$8.8 million in 2020.²⁶ The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) does not however have humanitarian response operations in Tunisia presently.²⁷

28. Bordering Libya, the Tunisian coast guard has been dealing with boat migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea.²⁸ The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) considers Tunisia a country of origin, transit and destination for humans who are exploited in various forms, including through human trafficking and smuggling of migrants.²⁹

13. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minurso>.

14. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/minurso_apr2020.pdf.

15. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/72161.pdf>.

16. www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/migratory-pressure/central-mediterranean-route/.

17. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5205>.

18. www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+WQ+E-2010-3173+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN.

19. www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c0_142_111_279.html.

20. www.gov.uk/government/publications/agreement-on-the-circulation-of-persons-and-readmission-between-the-uk-and-algeria.

21. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/algeria_en.

22. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/24764>.

23. www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/146.htm.

24. www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/algeria/terrorism.

25. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/tun>.

26. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2529>.

27. www.unocha.org/middle-east-and-north-africa-romena/tunisia.

28. <https://apnews.com/9d78ffa96e21f12838781bae6bd87990>.

29. www.unodc.org/middleeastandnorthafrica/en/web-stories/towards-stamping-out-human-trafficking-and-smuggling-of-migrants-in-tunisia.html.

29. In 2020, approximately 12 500 Tunisian citizens arrived as boat migrants in Italy, which equals 38.4% of all 34 133 migrants having arrived across the Mediterranean Sea in Italy in 2020 and constitutes the highest percentage and is three times higher than the 12.7% or 4 122 boat migrants from Bangladesh, which is the next highest group.³⁰

30. Under the European Neighbourhood Instrument of the European Union, Tunisia received assistance of €300 million per year from 2017 to 2020.³¹ The European Commission was mandated by the EU Council to establish a readmission agreement with Tunisia in 2014, but such an agreement does not yet exist.

31. The Council of Europe has an office in Tunis. Tunisia is a member of the Venice Commission and the North-South Centre.

32. In view of its border with Libya, Tunisia requires particular support. Closer co-operation with Italy and the EU might reduce the risk of people drowning in the Mediterranean Sea on their route to Italy. The Council of Europe could work with Tunisia in protecting social rights and combating human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

Libya

33. Libya has been terribly affected by armed conflicts.³² International stabilisation efforts have led to a ceasefire agreement in Geneva in October 2020, which all warring parties agreed to follow-up through implementation measures in November 2020.³³ The situation remains difficult, with Libya's revenues from natural resources still being interrupted.

34. In 2020, only 380 Libyans arrived in Italy or 1.2% of the total arrivals of boat migrants in Italy.³⁴ This indicates that Libyans do not generally migrate to, or seek asylum in, Europe.

35. Libya has become a prime country of transit for migrants seeking to reach Europe by sea.³⁵ The UNHCR appealed for funds of US\$84.1 million for 2020.³⁶ OCHA called for US\$114.9 million.³⁷

36. The European Union has set up several programmes for Libya, including protection and assistance for migrants and asylum seekers.³⁸ The EU Trust Fund for Africa funded 10 projects in Libya for nearly €340 million.³⁹ To put this in context, the general budget of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa is over €4.5 billion.

37. The UNHCR documented 373 709 internally displaced persons, 448 573 returnees and 48 626 registered refugees in Libya.⁴⁰ In February 2020, the IOM counted 653 800 migrants, 83% of whom were employed in Libya.⁴¹

38. Due to its rich oil and gas resources,⁴² Libya has traditionally been a country with many work migrants. The conflict in Libya affected their situation dramatically, and the African Union reacted to a modern slave market of foreign workers in Libya in 2017.⁴³ Council of Europe direct action in Libya does not seem practical at the moment, but member States and national parliaments are strongly encouraged to provide humanitarian support to this country which continues to have great needs. For instance, Italy has resettled refugees from Libya to Italy.

30. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5205>.

31. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/tunisia_en.

32. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1064422>.

33. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/11/1076852>.

34. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5205>.

35. www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/libyan-coastguard-detains-hundreds-migrants-200525191125794.html.

36. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/lby>.

37. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Libya%20-%202020%20Humanitarian%20Funding%20Overview%20%28As%20of%2014%20April%202020%29.pdf>.

38. www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/migratory-pressure/cenral-mediterranean-route/.

39. https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/north-africa/libya_en.

40. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/lby>.

41. https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/DTM_R29_Migrant_Report_KeyFindings.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=8325.

42. www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/166.htm.

43. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20171118/statement-chairperson-african-union-commission- plight-african-migrants-libya>.

Egypt

39. In Egypt, half of the 258 910 registered refugees and asylum seekers were from Syria in April 2020.⁴⁴ In November 2020,⁴⁵ the UNHCR still had registered 258 882 refugees and asylum seekers, 130 187 of whom were from Syria.⁴⁶ Most of them depend on aid and live on the outskirts of urban areas. The UNHCR appealed for funding of projects in Egypt totalling US\$108.8 million for 2020.⁴⁷

40. Under its Neighbourhood Instrument, the European Union has allocated an envelope of €432 to €528 million for Egypt for the years 2017 to 2020.⁴⁸

41. Egypt is currently affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and has been the target of terrorism, mainly by Daesh-Sinai, Al Qaeda aligned groups and Muslim Brotherhood aligned groups.⁴⁹ In 2020, Italy was the destination of 1 118 boat migrants with Egyptian citizenship.⁵⁰

42. The Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures, which has its seat in Alexandria, works with more than 4 500 civil society organisations from some 40 countries and had a budget of some €16 million for 2018-2020.⁵¹ As the Council of Europe is not present in Egypt, co-operation of the Assembly with this foundation or other partners could be envisaged.

Jordan

43. Already before the armed conflict in Syria, approximately half a million Syrians worked in neighbouring Jordan. Government estimates indicate that Jordan currently hosts approximately 1.3 million Syrians, of whom 654 681 have been registered as refugees at the end of 2019, besides some 90 000 refugees from other countries.⁵² The current number of Syrian refugees in Jordan is approximately 660 000.⁵³

44. In 2014, the Jordan Humanitarian Fund was established by OCHA, which funds humanitarian projects and has received US\$10 million for 2020, 7 million of which came from Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden.⁵⁴

45. An envelope of €335.5 million to €410.1 million has been allocated to Jordan under the EU Neighbourhood Instrument for the years 2017 to 2020.⁵⁵ The establishment of a readmission agreement with Jordan was decided by the EU Council in 2015, but the European Commission is still pursuing this mandate.

46. As the Jordanian Parliament has partner for democracy status with the Assembly, dialogue should be increased with a focus on humanitarian needs.

Lebanon

47. Lebanon hosted 910 256 refugees from Syria and 13 002 from Iraq in 2019.⁵⁶ In addition, approximately 200 000 Palestinian refugees are hosted in Lebanon and supported by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). By September 2020, the number of Syrian refugees fell to 879 529 registered refugees.⁵⁷

48. The UNHCR requested US\$535 million for Lebanon in 2020. In 2019, it provided *inter alia* unrestricted cash assistance of US\$175 per month to some 34 600 refugee families in Jordan and intended to do the same for 2020.⁵⁸

44. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Egypt%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20April%202020.pdf>.

45. https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Egypt_Fact%20Sheet_November%202020.pdf.

46. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/1>.

47. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/egypt>.

48. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/egypt_en.

49. www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/egypt/terrorism.

50. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5205>.

51. www.annalindhfoundation.org/about.

52. http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Jordan%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20November%202019_0.pdf.

53. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36>.

54. www.unocha.org/jordan/donor-contributions.

55. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/jordan_en.

56. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Lebanon%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20January%202020.pdf>.

57. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>.

58. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Lebanon%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20January%202020.pdf>.

49. The major explosions in the port of Beirut on 4 August 2020 heavily damaged parts of the city, injured some 6 000 persons and left 204 persons dead. On 14 August 2020, the United Nations launched a US\$565 million appeal to support relief and recovery action.⁵⁹ WHO called for US\$ 76 million for its Beirut Port Blast Emergency Strategic Response Plan.⁶⁰ The UNHCR mobilised US\$35 million for its emergency response action.⁶¹ The IOM appealed for emergency funding of US\$10.37 million.⁶² The suffering caused by the explosions still continues, as reconstruction work seems to be difficult.⁶³

50. The EU Neighbourhood Initiative allocated an envelope of €186.5 million to €227.9 million to Lebanon for the years 2017 to 2020.⁶⁴ Following the explosion at the port of Beirut, the European Union adopted an additional support package of nearly €100 million.⁶⁵

51. Islamist terrorism is a grave problem in Lebanon, in particular in Tripoli, Palestinian refugee camps and in areas close to the Syrian border.⁶⁶

52. Boat migrants from Lebanon often try to reach Cyprus, which signed an agreement on irregular migration with the Lebanese government in 2002.⁶⁷ Lebanon also signed a bilateral readmission agreement with Switzerland in 2004, which entered into force in 2006.⁶⁸ Numbers of returned migrants are not known, but they would obviously require support at home in Lebanon.

53. Due to the difficult situation in Lebanon, and in particular the security situation, direct Council of Europe action seems unlikely. It is thus all the more important that members of the Assembly, and national parliaments with bilateral contacts, do what they can to promote support for this country in crisis.

Syria

54. Syria has been heavily affected by armed conflict and terrorism, with some 6.1 million internally displaced persons, 5.5 million Syrian refugees registered in other countries,⁶⁹ and 1.4 million persons returned to Syria by 2019.⁷⁰ There were 16 213 refugees and 11 795 asylum seekers in Syria in 2019.⁷¹

55. The northern part of Syria bordering Turkey has been called a safety zone by Turkey, which formerly included several camps for displaced persons and a large penal detention centre at al-Hol for alleged or convicted Daesh fighters.⁷²

56. This complex situation causes severe and unclear humanitarian situation. The UNHCR is present in many parts of Syria and requested funds of US\$584.7 million for 2020.⁷³

57. In 2015 the European Union set up the Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, which has reached a total volume of €1.8 billion, in order to provide assistance for countries hosting Syrian refugees. In addition, the European Union provided €920 million of humanitarian assistance to the population affected inside Syria.⁷⁴

58. It is important to note that Turkey currently hosts 3.65 million registered Syrian refugees,⁷⁵ most of whom are in the Istanbul region and in south-eastern Turkey along the Syrian border.⁷⁶ Almost 60 000 of these persons live in camps.⁷⁷ Turkey has been at the forefront of dealing with Syrians with protection needs.

59. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1070242>.

60. www.who.int/emergencies/funding/appeals/lebanon-explosion-2020.

61. www.unhcr.org/lb/response-to-beirut-blast.

62. <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/sites/default/files/uploaded-files/IOM%20Lebanon%20Appeal%20%20-%20BEIRUT%20PORT%20EXPLOSIONS%20AUG%20-%20DEC%202020.pdf>.

63. www.transparency.org/en/press/the-beirut-blast-recovery-and-reconstruction-monitor.

64. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/lebanon_en.

65. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2516.

66. www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/lebanon/terrorism.

67. www.themigrantproject.org/lebanon-migrants-cyprus/.

68. www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c0_142_114_899.html.

69. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>.

70. <https://hno-syria.org/#key-figures>.

71. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Syria%20Main%20Activities%20-%20January%202020.pdf>.

72. www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-49973218.

73. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Syrian%20Arab%20Republic%20Funding%20Update%2029%20April%202020.pdf>.

74. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/syria_en.

75. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/113>.

59. Far greater support needs to be given in particular to Turkey as well as other countries which have to deal with the brunt of this massive population flow into Europe. A huge amount of investment is also needed in Syria to help meet the humanitarian needs and rebuild society and infrastructure.

Iraq

60. Iraq had been affected by the armed conflict with Daesh from 2014 to 2017. In August 2019, the IOM counted 1 552 914 internally displaced persons in Iraq besides 4.35 million returnees, and the UNHCR registered in Iraq 228 573 Syrian refugees as well as 42 559 other refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Turkey, Iran, the Palestinian territories and Sudan.⁷⁸

61. The UNHCR requested funding of US\$510.5 million for 2020.⁷⁹ Since 2015, the European Union provided humanitarian aid of some €458 million to displaced persons and refugees in Iraq.⁸⁰

62. Iraq is a member of OPEC and has important oil and gas resources.⁸¹ Similar to other countries in the MENA region, the current Covid-19 pandemic also reached Iraq. OCHA follows the situation.⁸²

63. Given the high level of funding of humanitarian aid for Iraq from European States and the EU, national parliaments should follow closely the effectiveness of this aid and be ready to share information and strategies for humanitarian assistance to migrants, internally displaced persons and refugees in Iraq.

Yemen

64. The armed conflict of the Houthis in Yemen has continued since 2015 and displaced many persons, leading to more than 230 000 fatalities.⁸³ According to UNHCR data, there were 3 647 250 internally displaced persons and 1 280 562 returnees in August 2019.⁸⁴ In October 2019,⁸⁵ the UNHCR registered 266 877 refugees and 10 435 asylum-seekers, with some 150 000 remaining unregistered. In February 2020, there were 282 257 refugees, some 90% of whom were from Somalia,⁸⁶ but the UNHCR estimates that the number of refugees might decrease to some 140 000 in 2020 due to returns of refugees.⁸⁷

65. The UNHCR has appealed for funds of US\$211 857 873 for Yemen in 2020.⁸⁸ Since 2015, the EU allocated €484 million in humanitarian aid.⁸⁹ For 2021, OCHA estimates that 24.3 million persons in Yemen need humanitarian assistance due to escalating violence and deteriorating economic prospects.⁹⁰

66. In addition, Yemen has been experiencing an outbreak of cholera since 2016. WHO estimates that 1.3 million persons have been infected between 2018 and January 2020.⁹¹ In this context, the World Bank provided in 2017 an emergency grant of US\$200 million for Yemen.⁹²

67. Faced with an extremely serious humanitarian crisis, Yemen requires more attention from European States including national parliaments.

76. www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2044151/UNHCR_Provincial+Breakdown+Syrian+Refugees+in+Turkey+-+January+2021.png.

77. <https://reliefweb.int/map/turkey/unhcr-turkey-syrian-refugee-camps-and-provincial-breakdown-syrian-refugees-registered-26>.

78. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/iraq>.

79. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Iraq%20Funding%20Update%2029%20April%202020.pdf>.

80. https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/iraq_en.

81. www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/164.htm.

82. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-humanitarian-bulletin-april-2020>.

83. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1078972>.

84. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/yem>.

85. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2647>.

86. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/yem>.

87. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2647>.

88. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/yem>.

89. https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/yemen_en.

90. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1078972>.

91. www.emro.who.int/pandemic-epidemic-diseases/cholera/outbreak-update-cholera-in-yemen-12-january-2020.html.

92. www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2017/08/28/world-bank-mobilizes-us200-million-to-combat-cholera-in-yemen.

3. Humanitarian action concerning migrants and refugees in North Africa and the Middle East

Council of Europe

68. The situation of migrants and refugees in the MENA region has been of interest and on the agenda of the Assembly in the past. [Resolution 2224 \(2018\)](#) “The humanitarian situation of refugees in the countries neighbouring Syria”, and [Resolution 1971 \(2014\)](#) “Syrian refugees: how to organise and support international assistance?”, highlighted the difficulties faced by neighbouring countries in dealing with Syrian refugees. [Resolution 2215 \(2018\)](#) “The situation in Libya: prospects and role of the Council of Europe” stressed the dramatic situation of refugees and migrants in Libya and required member States to refrain from sending migrants back to countries where their lives were endangered. [Resolution 1919 \(2013\)](#) “Recent developments in Mali and Algeria and the threat to security and human rights in the Mediterranean region” focused on threats to security and human rights, especially those due to terrorism in the Sahel Zone.

69. Through its North-South Centre, the Council of Europe has worked with countries in the MENA region.⁹³ Some MENA countries have acceded to Council of Europe conventions and are members of partial agreements such as the Venice Commission and the Pompidou Group. The Assembly maintains inter-parliamentary contacts with observers and partners for democracy from the MENA region.

70. The Council of Europe has offices in Rabat and Tunis, which implement practical work in Morocco and Tunisia. Regarding the subject of this report, the EU/CoE regional joint programme “Ensuring Sustainable Democratic Governance and Human Rights in the Southern Mediterranean” 2020-2022 could be of particular relevance.

71. For example, Morocco’s National Commission for Co-ordinating Measures for Combating and Preventing Trafficking in Human Beings and the Council of Europe organised an event to mark the World Day against Trafficking in Persons in Rabat on 27 July 2020, in partnership with the IOM and the UNODC. For and with Tunisia, the Council of Europe supports the creation of a national anti-trafficking body under the “Project to support independent bodies in Tunisia” and launched the Passport on the Rights of Victims of Trafficking in Persons (in Arabic and French) on 27 July 2020.⁹⁴

72. In view of the magnitude of the crises and the geographical proximity of MENA countries, the plight of refugees and migrants in this region should receive more attention, in particular from the Assembly and national parliaments. It will therefore be important to continuously raise awareness about the specific humanitarian needs.

European Union

73. The European Union and its member States are major donors of humanitarian aid. Under the EU Trust Fund for Africa, more than 220 programmes have been approved worth some €4.4 billion.⁹⁵ Through its €3.1 billion budget, the Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations supports humanitarian action in several crisis regions, which have seen major population movements and caused many to leave their countries. The European Union is a member of the OCHA Donor Support Group, which advises on policies and financial questions.

74. The EU also conducts donor conferences in order to supplement funds for humanitarian assistance. From 12 to 14 March 2019, the European Union and the United Nations co-chaired the Brussels III Conference, which addressed key issues affecting Syrians inside their country as well as refugees within their host communities, in particular in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Donors pledged US\$8.8 billion for the Syria Humanitarian Response, double the money that was pledged for the year 2018.

United Nations

75. OCHA has called for US\$31.7 billion in humanitarian funding for 180.9 million people in need globally in April 2020⁹⁶ and finally received US\$25.66 billion by December 2020.⁹⁷ It receives funds from many countries, among which the five biggest contributors in 2020 were ⁹⁸ the USA with US\$36 730 000, Sweden

93. www.coe.int/en/web/north-south-centre.

94. <https://rm.coe.int/odgp-der-coe-quarterly-reports-july-september-2020-en-2779-1368-5762-v/1680a05bb9>.

95. https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/content/trust-fund-financials_en.

96. www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHO_Monthly_Update_6APR2020.pdf.

97. www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHO_Monthly_Update_31DEC2020.pdf.

98. www.unocha.org/funding#donor-others.

with US\$31 688 472, the United Kingdom with US\$22 547 490, Norway with US\$14 071 696 and Germany with US\$12 304 424. In addition, the European Union has so far contributed US\$11 440 960. However, only a percentage of the estimated funding needs are finally met by States and donors.

76. The main UN agencies providing humanitarian aid are the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP). In the Middle East, the UNRWA also conducts humanitarian action in different countries to support Palestinian refugees. The OCHA is the agency co-ordinating all the responses to emergencies. The role of the OCHA Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (ROMENA) is increasingly important, as the situation within the region has worsened.

77. The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council include a Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons and a Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants. Concerning the country mandates, the UN has established a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories and a Special Rapporteur on the situation on human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic, considering the length and magnitude of both conflicts.

African Union

78. The African Union legal framework includes several conventions dealing with the protection of migrants and refugees in Africa. The Kampala Convention establishes a legal framework to prevent internal displacement and promotes co-operation between AU member States. By ratifying the convention, member States agree to assist internally displaced persons by meeting their basic needs; to respect the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence; and to protect their rights. The Convention also ensures that humanitarian assistance is not restricted.

79. The Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union, which formulates opinions and provides inputs into the policies of the African Union, has a specific Sectorial Cluster Committee on Political Affairs. This includes the issue of humanitarian affairs and assistance.

80. Other conventions, including the Convention governing the specific aspects of refugees' problems in Africa and the Protocol to the treaty establishing the African Economic Community relating to free movement of persons, right of residence and right of establishment, also deserve recognition.

4. Conclusions

81. The Middle East and the Northern Africa region is very important for Europe, especially with regard to the numbers of migrants and refugees coming from or through these countries. Therefore, the Assembly should establish closer inter-parliamentary contacts and action with MENA countries.

82. MENA countries should be invited to accede to the relevant legal standards of the Council of Europe or participate in related work, with a view to improving the humanitarian situation of refugees and migrants.

83. When human rights and humanitarian standards are not respected, persons will naturally feel compelled to leave their homes and travel. Fostering humanitarian co-operation and assisting countries and persons in need is necessary for allowing people to live in dignity, freedom, justice and safety in their own countries, countries of transit or in countries which grant them asylum.

84. National humanitarian assistance needs to be co-ordinated in order to avoid parallel or even contradictory international action. As parliaments have the power to decide on national budgets, their members should actively participate in debates about the funding of humanitarian action as well as in the parliamentary monitoring of the proper use of such funding.

85. With the help of the technological progress achieved in teleconferencing during the Covid-19 pandemic, geographical distances have become less dividing for political contacts and meetings. The Assembly should try to establish thematic working relations and co-operation with the African Union regarding humanitarian projects for refugees and migrants.

86. Relevant sectors and bodies of the Council of Europe should enlarge their geographical remit, in particular regarding forced displacement and migration. The Assembly can be an intra-institutional partner in such work in particular through the partnerships for democracy established, or which could be established with a number of parliaments in the region.