



Online Consultation Summary Report Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

19 January – 15 February 2015

This report summarizes the online comments and contributions received as part of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) global online consultation for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The report will inform the regional consultation meeting in Amman, Jordan on 3-5 March 2015, and be integrated into the formation of priorities for the first WHS in 2016.

About the online consultation

The moderated¹ discussion forum provided an open, public forum² to provoke debate and stimulate thinking about how to keep humanitarian action fit for the future, in order to inform the regional consultation meeting. Participation in the forum was open to anyone who registered, from any origin or location. **More than 4000 individuals viewed the discussions and more than 300 comments were received in Arabic and English, representing a broad range of countries and organizations³.**

A total of ten questions were discussed, sparking lively debate around [five of the ten themes](#) identified in the [Regional Scoping Paper](#), as well as cross-cutting issues and broader, general recommendations. The discussion questions were developed by the Discussion Chair and Moderators in consultation with the OCHA Regional Office and WHS Secretariat.

Discussion Questions

Part 1 of the discussion consisted of five initial questions focused on how to make humanitarian action fit for future challenges. In part two, five follow-up questions were posted by the Chair and Moderators.

¹ The discussion took place at: www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_mena, chaired by Ambassador Hesham Youssef, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Organization of Islamic Cooperation and moderated by Mona Shahab, Executive Manager, Intercultural Initiative Department, Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation, Tareq Al-Bakri, Acting Director, The Humanitarian Forum, Carlo Scaramella, Deputy Regional Director, WFP Regional Bureau for MENA, Central Asia and Eastern Europe, Rabih Shibli, Director, Community Projects and Development Unit, American University of Beirut and Pasquale Lupoli, Regional Director IOM for the Middle East and North Africa and Chief of Mission for Egypt.

² The discussion was publicized through a number of channels including humanitarian and development media and networks such as ReliefWeb, IRIN, United Nations (UN) agencies and NGOs, through UN Member States, social media and via emails to various humanitarian groups such as the International Association of Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection (PHAP) network.

³ Comments were received from individuals, national governments, international NGOs, regional institutions, community-based organizations, research organizations, donor organizations and independent consultants, based at headquarters, regional and national offices and in the field.

Key recommendations

1. Humanitarian effectiveness

- Raise awareness of and ensure respect and adherence to humanitarian principles.
- Improve training, preparation and support for humanitarian workers in complex political environments.
- Reconsider notion of State Sovereignty to ensure aid reaches those in need.
- Improve access to accurate, reliable data and information in crises.

2. Preparedness and resilience

- Build common understanding and shared knowledge to enhance preparedness, Resilience and DRR.
- Improve community engagement and integration with national efforts.
- Promote use of advancements in innovations.

3. Protracted crises

- Recalibrate projects from humanitarian/rapid impact towards sustainable development.
- Ensure availability of quality education as a tool to foster resilience in short and long-term crises.
- Implement capacity-building projects to ensure legal rights and protection of refugees.

4. Affected Communities

- Consider affected communities as actors, not only beneficiaries, using their contributions more.
- Train affected communities on procedures guiding the work of humanitarian agencies.
- Improve coordination between humanitarian stakeholders and flexibility in humanitarian programmes.
- Improve two-way communication between affected communities and humanitarian actors.

5. Migration

- Ensure human rights protection for migrants and displaced individuals.
- Long-term capacity-building at central government and community levels to support migrants.
- Provide information on safe migration and the dangers of irregular migration.
- Increase broader understanding, detection and combatting of human trafficking.

Table 1: Number of comments received to each question⁴

Questions	Comments in English	Comments in Arabic
Part 1		
1. HUMANITARIAN ACCESS: What are the main humanitarian access constraints in the MENA region for affected people and humanitarian organizations? How can we improve access?	23	17
2. PREPAREDNESS AND RESILIENCE: How can the MENA region better prepare for increasing displacement, conflict and exposure to natural hazards?	16	11
3. PROTRACTED CRISES: What should we do differently to more sustainably respond to the needs of those affected in protracted crises in the MENA region?	62	3
4. AFFECTED COMMUNITIES: What are the main obstacles to better engaging affected communities in the MENA region and to better understanding their priorities and needs? What should we do to address these?	12	5
5. MIGRATION: What are the main factors that expose migrants and displaced individuals in the MENA region to vulnerabilities and risks to their safety and well-being? What can be done to reduce this?	21	10
Part 2		
1. HUMANITARIAN ACCESS: How can we facilitate access while protecting humanitarian workers?	35	1
2. PREPAREDNESS AND RESILIENCE: How can we address the gap in meeting rapidly increasing needs?	28	3
3. PROTRACTED CRISES: How can we strengthen the resilience of people and institutions?	28	1
4. AFFECTED COMMUNITIES: How can humanitarian organizations better understand the needs of affected people and reflect these in programming?	21	1
5. MIGRATION: How can we protect people in crisis from human trafficking?	19	0
TOTAL COMMENTS:	265	46

Key issues

Detailed summaries of the contributions to the discussion are annexed below in the interim summary and available on the website. During the discussion participants highlighted the following issues as crucial for the future effectiveness of humanitarian action in the region.

1. Humanitarian effectiveness

Participants in the consultation highlighted barriers to safe and effective humanitarian action in the MENA region due to geopolitical causes, (aid used as a tool of war, lack of humanitarian corridors, imposing mobility restrictions on affected communities or aid workers), operational reasons, (concern over aid workers' security, government red tape, lack of capacities, logistical complications, language differences, lack of coordination mechanisms or insufficient resources), and perceived overlap between humanitarian actors' political and humanitarian mandates and roles. Throughout the discussion participants emphasized the need to raise awareness of and ensure respect and adherence to humanitarian principles.

In terms of solutions to enable humanitarian workers to negotiate safe access to deliver aid to affected communities, and for those in conflict zones to safely receive assistance, some contributors suggested the use of drones for assessing needs and/or delivering humanitarian aid, while others highlighted the common practice of remote management from safer zones. Many agreed that aid workers need to be well prepared, trained and

⁴ Many participants posted more than once and responded to more than one discussion question.

supported to deal with barriers to access in such complex environments, for example, the prevailing perception that humanitarian workers are not neutral, either due to the perceived overlapping roles of the UN or the view of INGOs as a continuation of the region's past colonial or imperial rulers.

Contributors also spoke of the challenge to negotiating the access aid organizations need to establish dialogue, build and maintain trust with all parties to a conflict including the army, armed groups, community leaders and influencers on parties. Humanitarian workers need to be trained to consistently demonstrate to all parties involved their integrity and transparency in delivering aid to affected communities, based solely on prioritized needs and not on any other criteria.

Contributors also highlighted that global and regional multilateral organizations should reconsider the notion of State Sovereignty and not use it as a pretext to prevent or block aid from reaching those who need it, increasing their human suffering as a consequence. Some contributors suggested that a Security Council mandate should impose decisions that will ultimately alleviate human suffering in conflict zones rather than deepen it.

The discussion on how to facilitate access while protecting humanitarian workers highlighted the importance of gathering and analyzing relevant and timely information and making it available to humanitarian workers. Some called for development, endorsement and embracing of “professional standards in risk assessment and analysis” backed with clarity on organizations’ risk-taking thresholds. To ensure the safety and security of staff, contributors cautioned against playing the army’s role to maintain security and mistakenly gathering intelligence for political reasons.

At the same time, participants argued that humanitarian workers should realize their limited agency to influence the political framework. Ultimately, contributors agreed that humanitarian workers should be able to balance the risks associated with fulfilling their humanitarian mission while upholding humanitarian principles, both in rhetoric and practice.

2. Preparedness and resilience

Criticality of building common understanding and shared knowledge to enhance preparedness, resilience and DRR: There is a consensus that a better understanding of the nature and interdependency of risk factors and drivers in the MENA region is needed in order to ensure that preparatory actions can be taken to mitigate potential future risks. A shared understanding of risks and vulnerabilities is a precondition for good disaster risk governance and management. Related to that is the importance of establishing and sharing a network of services including risk mapping, vulnerability baselines and early warning systems. It is therefore a priority to ensure systematic learning and knowledge sharing processes especially during emergencies. Similarly, in cases of protracted crisis, a failure to learn and predict trends and the changing nature of risks coupled with insufficient learning and awareness, will outline future struggles. Stronger and joint efforts in research and analysis of the interplay of different contributing drivers and causes will support the development of multi-dimensional perspectives that embed DRR and Resilience-building into humanitarian assistance.

Importance of community engagement and integration with national efforts: The importance of empowering communities, building local institutional capacities and strengthening standards and networks across countries in the region was emphasized by the participants. It is through the engagement of local communities, national governments and institutions, as well as regional organizations, that the international community at large will be able to work towards common principles and goals in a more integrated fashion. Community ownership and empowerment are crucial in emergency preparedness, response and disaster risk management. Equally crucial is ensuring that responses of large NGOs and UN agencies are properly integrated into national institutions and communities to amplify the impact and sustainability of preparedness and resilience efforts.

Significance of advancements in innovations: Innovation and advancements in technology as a means to alleviate the stresses of humanitarian assistance was emphasized. Among other things, innovations strengthen risk management capacities, support the establishment of Information Management frameworks and the integration of Disaster Preparedness and offer new modalities of assistance. Non-traditional partners should be better integrated in assistance frameworks to capitalize on their respective areas of experience.

3. Protracted crises

This topic was the most active, with 94 comments received. In discussion how humanitarian organizations, the following three main areas of recommendations were highlighted by participants.

Programming for a protracted temporary stay: Contributors highlighted the importance of recalibrating projects from humanitarian and quick impact towards sustainable development. Suggestions focused on the adaptation of the humanitarian coordination structure to include voices that are very active on the grassroots levels but are not being represented in policy meetings or in sector working groups. Locating and empowering local central and/or de-centralized partners. Allow sharing of information and exchange of knowledge among international organizations, local NGOs and local governments. Investing in national capacities, emphasizing partnerships between international and local actors. Urge donors to invest in sustainable livelihoods for the affected populations; contributors gave the example of livelihood initiatives and access to employment for Syrian refugees. Address the rising tensions among refugees and host communities and start by alleviating the basic negative externalities. Promote dignity and self-reliance among refugees by engaging them in temporary jobs that don't cause conflicts with the local labour force. Develop a rigorous **code of conduct** to ensure effectiveness and accountability.

Quality Education: Contributors highlighted that, as more than fifty percent of refugees are below the age of 18, quality education represents the best tool to foster resilience in the face of short-term or protracted crises. The purpose of education for refugee children is not simply to convey academic information, it also serves to socialize children into their new context. At a minimum, education needs to prioritize a few key learning objectives that are universally necessary and applicable: language development (most often English); critical thinking skills; and mathematics. Teaching someone how to think critically, communicate effectively and problem solve are the first steps towards ensuring resiliency and adaptability in the face of hardship and continuing challenges. Outside the safety networks of their homes and families, participants considered education the critical route to protect child refugees. Although an “agreed curriculum” might be a daunting task, there should be a focus on human rights, religious tolerance and respect of the environment. It was recommended that the educational programme is integrated into the host educational system, as well to scaling-up informal education in Informal Tented Settlements.

Health security and resilience: In addition to the role of education as a tool to foster resilience among refugees, capacity building projects that address the legal rights and protection of refugees is also key. Resilience requires ensuring that the basic services of refugees are being met, and they are also entitled to medical services. Currently, health services and aid provision focus on shelter, food, sanitation, hygiene and infectious diseases, with long-term conditions lacking in the mandate of most relief agencies. Training on the health issues of frail seniors and psychosocial aspects of emergencies should be conducted and standardized. Trauma and mental health are other factors that need to be more seriously addressed for refugees enduring protracted stay. The verticalization of aid between “humanitarian” and “development” architecture and funding streams creates barriers to efforts to build the resilience of individuals and their communities, particularly in protracted crises.

4. Affected Communities

Participants highlighted several key obstacles to better engaging affected communities and understanding their priorities and needs in the MENA region. Physical distance between humanitarian agencies and beneficiaries was mentioned, with security issues identified as the main reason for this. The **use of local partners or subcontractors** by international organizations to deliver assistance to the field is thought to minimize engagement with affected communities, although it is recommended as a way to overcome security concerns. The use of **innovative ICTs** was also suggested to retain contact with stakeholders in the field when insecurity prevents a physical presence.

Humanitarian actors' **lack of knowledge** of the affected communities is also regarded as a major impediment. In the MENA region, it is for instance essential to understand and take into consideration the complex relationships between different cultural and religious groups when developing a humanitarian intervention. It is also important to **tailor responses to specific groups** within affected communities, such as the elderly or people with disabilities. Contributors suggested conducting in-depth analyses of the communities to better consider these issues.

Affected communities' lack of knowledge of humanitarian processes is also identified as an obstacle. If they are unaware of the complex requirements and procedures humanitarian actors have to follow, or of the differences and relationships between humanitarian actors, beneficiaries cannot elaborate feasible plans of action. Participants recommended **providing training for community leaders and local partners to empower them**. They also highlighted that **better coordination amongst humanitarian agencies** would help in this matter.

Several participants highlighted the fact that contributions from affected communities should be considered more as they are the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid and often know better what their needs are. They should also be considered as **actors and not only as recipients**, as affected communities are made of valuable assets such as civil society organizations and leaders. Establishing community committees or using KAP surveys, interviews and open venue discussions to understand their response to a specific intervention can improve their engagement and the donors' understanding of the impacted populations.

Contributions also pointed out to the need for **more adaptability in humanitarian programmes**. Working with other donors and stakeholders in the elaboration and implementation of humanitarian interventions often proves more effective but requires flexibility from all parties. Updating activities as situations evolve is also important and should be facilitated throughout implementation.

Communication between affected communities and humanitarian actors was discussed as a key element in effectively responding to crisis. Gathering information from and providing it to the beneficiaries is often a challenge for international organizations that use specific terminology and do not adapt to their target audience. Establishing a **centralized system for collecting data from the field** and feeding it into the processes at a higher level was one of the final recommendations towards improving community engagement and aid efficiency.

5. Migration

In discussing the factors that expose migrants and displaced individuals in the region to vulnerabilities and risks to their safety and well-being, and how they can be better protected, the following recommendations emerged.

Ensure human rights protection for migrants and displaced individuals: Source and host countries should put in place adequate measures to more effectively protect and assist vulnerable migrants stranded in countries in crisis situations, and migrants in mixed migration flows. Migrants – including victims of trafficking, internally displaced persons, migrants caught in crisis, unaccompanied minors – must be afforded the same protection of their human rights as all other affected groups in times of crisis.

Long-term capacity-building at central government and community level to support migrants: Besides short-

term support to governments in building their capacity to deal with the immediate crisis situation, there also needs to be more long-term capacity-building at the central government level, in terms of managing migration, responding to local and international labour demands, and harnessing the benefits of remittances (the human, financial and social capital associated with remittances, as well as returns). In the same vein, the capacity-building of community institutions must be enhanced to provide guidance to youth on income-generating activities, and technical support should be given to community health facilities to enable them to provide better psychosocial support to returnees and their families.

Provide information on safe migration and the dangers of irregular migration: starting in schools and reaching out to the communities in areas with high rates of irregular migration. Broader awareness-raising campaigns should also be carried out in communities of origin, through the media and public debates, on the hazards of migration and the difficulties faced by returnees.

Improve broader understanding, detection and combatting of human trafficking: This could imply developing mechanisms to reduce the occurrence of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, before, at the outset, during and after emergencies as well as identify innovative ways to address human trafficking when State led law enforcement measures cannot operate normally. Humanitarians need to work together with civil society, State and non-State actors to find collaborative and effective approaches to tackle comprehensively this issue.

Comments on this report are welcomed. Please post online at:

www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_MENA or email to: MENA@whsummit.org.

Detailed summaries of the contributions to the discussion can be found in the interim summaries annexed below and available on the website.

This report was drafted by the Discussion Chair and Moderators with support from the WHS secretariat, OCHA MENA Regional Office (ROMENA) and UN Online Volunteers: Christelle Cazabat (France), Noha M. Gamal Eldine, Lyndall King (UK), Tina Mason (UK), Mahmoud Nabil, Jennifer Lynette (USA), Aleksandrina Mavrodieva, (Bulgaria) and Reham Soliman.

Disclaimer: the findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this discussion summary report are those of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of the World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, UNOCHA, the United Nations or the participants' organizations.