



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

MIDDLE EAST OVERVIEW

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1. BACKGROUND

The year 2020 carried on what 2019 had left: Societal struggle against corruption, lack of justice, and creeping poverty. Revolutions erupted in the Middle East, and yet the corrupt political class still remain unabated. In Lebanon, it is feared that the new government formed of political advisors, will bring disappointment despite having promised viable change. Still, the country is being manipulated by the same group of people who are exhausting the nation's financial resources while poverty is continuously on the rise. Unfortunately, the same is perceived in Iraq, where blood baths have yielded no rewards whatsoever.

The MECC, once again raises the voice against all forms of corruption and injustice. The deteriorating socioeconomic situation has led it to consider a more forward approach in its attempt to combat poverty and its repercussions; by admitting that the region is in an emergency situation that requires it to send emergency appeals to all of its donors. Hopefully, MECC's international partners will rush to its aid, despite the ever-growing shadow of donor fatigue.



2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

Egypt

- Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly issued a decree to form a ministerial cluster for investment to be chaired by him, to encourage investment, eliminate hurdles facing investors, and suggest solutions to accelerate and simplify investors' work.¹
- According to statistics agency CAPMAS, there are increased chances of holding interest rates by banks this month, due to the rise of annual urban consumer inflation.²
- USAID launched a new research initiative worth 90 million USD to assist Egypt in transferring to a knowledge-based economy.³
- According to Beltone Financial Investment Bank, it achieved a steady increase in money supply thanks to Egypt's positive GDP outlook.⁴
- Egypt announced that it will increase Suez Canal toll by 5% for dry bulk vessels and LPG carriers this coming April.⁵
- The World Bank Group (WBG) mentioned in its Global Economic Prospects that Egypt will pick up on its economic growth in 2020.⁶
- ExxonMobil has acquired over 1.7mn acres for offshore exploration in Egypt.⁷
- 15.8114 EG/USD official currency exchange rate.⁸

¹ Ahram, Jan 6, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/359001/Business/Economy/Egypt-PM-issues-decree-to-form-new-ministerial-clu.aspx>

² Nasdaq, Jan 9, 2020, <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/egypts-annual-headline-inflation-rises-to-7.1-in-december-2020-01-09>

³ Ahram, Jan 9, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/359237/Business/Economy/USAID-launches--mln-initiative-on-knowledge-econom.aspx>

⁴ Mena Fn, Jan 9, 2020, <https://menafn.com/1099530628/Steady-expansion-in-banks-financial-position-healthy-growth-in-money-supply-thanks-to-positive-nominal-GDP-outlook-Beltone>

⁵ Aawsat, Jan. 5, 2020, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2067781/egypt-increases-suez-canal-toll-5>

⁶ Mena Fn, January 13, 2020, <https://menafn.com/1099543550/Egyptys-economic-growth-to-pick-up-in-2020-supported-by-monetary-policy-easing-WBG>

⁷ Business Chief, Jan 6, 2020, <https://africa.businesschief.com/leadership/4696/ExxonMobil-strengthens-its-exploration-portfolio-in-Egypt>

⁸ <http://www.cbe.org.eg/en/EconomicResearch/Statistics/Pages/ExchangeRatesListing.aspx>



Jordan

- During an interview by France 24, His Majesty King Abdulla stressed the importance of providing young people with job opportunities.⁹
- Jordan's Finance Minister voiced his request that the new IMF plan would reduce debt service costs.¹⁰
- According to the IMF, the GDP is expected to increase by 2.2% in 2020.¹¹
- Lawmakers from House Financial Committee suggested that the total public expenditure be reduced in a manner that will keep the estimated deficit level within the GDP ratio.¹²
- Jordan's Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, has begun using Nutanix enterprise cloud software as a means to invigorate and digitalize the economy, promote entrepreneurship and innovation and create jobs.¹³
- A Jordanian-Moroccan Investment Forum was held in Amman to enhance economic cooperation between the two countries and explore potentials for investment. As such, a series of proposals and measures were discussed to simplify cooperation between private and public sectors of both countries.¹⁴
- 1.428 USD Jordanian official currency value.¹⁵

⁹ Zawya, January 14, 2020,

https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/economy/story/We_want_a_better_life_for_Jordan__King_Abdullah-SNG_164473552/

¹⁰ Reuters, January 7, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-jordan-economy-imf/jordan-finance-minister-says-new-imf-plan-needed-to-reduce-debt-service-costs-idUSKBN1YCOOC>

¹¹ Zawya, January 12, 2020,

https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/economy/story/Jordans_GDP_to_grow_by_22_in_2020_IMF-SNG_164191247/

¹² Jordan Times, January 13, 2020, <https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/lawmakers-debate-budget-bill-recommend-curbed-public-spending>

¹³ Jan 15, 2020, Intelligent CIO, <https://www.intelligentcio.com/me/2020/01/15/nutanix-helps-accelerate-jordanian-governments-digital-transformation/>

¹⁴ Jordan Times, Jan 16, 2020, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-morocco-forum-explores-investment-economic-partnership-potential>

¹⁵ <http://statisticaldb.cbj.gov.jo/index?action=level4>



Iraq

- As a result of the assassination of Gen. Soleimani, several American employees working in the country and especially in the oil field, were pulled out of the country.¹⁶
- Even though the country is moving through uncertain times, The World Bank expects Iraq's GDP to grow by nearly 5 percent in 2020 due to increased oil production.¹⁷
- After the spike in tensions between Iran and US, oil prices increased only to decrease later on.¹⁸
- The Trump administration threatened to impose sanctions on the Iraqi government after it asked the US to pull American forces from Iraq.¹⁹
- The US warned Iraq that it would lose access to its Key Bank Account which withholds oil revenues, if it endorses policies against it.²⁰
- The Oil Ministry has removed Abdul Mahdy al-Ameedi who had made it possible for the signing of several contracts with oil companies. This move was the result of a strict new retirement law.²¹
- 1190 Dinar /USD Iraqi official currency exchange rate.²²

Lebanon

- During January, deteriorating economic conditions once again brought citizens onto the streets, blocking roads and burning tires.²³
- According to former Minister of Economy Nasser Saidi, Lebanon needs about 20-25 billion USD and IMF support to emerge from its financial crisis.²⁴

¹⁶ CNN, Jan. 3, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/03/business/us-oil-company-workers-leaving-iraq/index.html>

¹⁷ Borgen Magazine, Jan 8, 2020, <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/the-road-to-economic-recovery-in-iraq/#prettyPhoto/0/>

¹⁸ BBC, Jan 8, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-50979492>

¹⁹ Aawsat, January 6, 2020, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2069511/iraq-trumps-sanctions-threat-brings-bitter-flashbacks>

²⁰ Wall Street Journal, Jan 11, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-warns-iraq-it-risks-losing-access-to-key-bank-account-if-troops-told-to-leave-11578759629>

²¹ Iraq Oil Report, Jan 13, 2020, <https://www.iraqoilreport.com/news/oil-ministry-shakeup-sees-new-ioc-contracts-chief-and-return-of-ex-basra-oil-director-42402/>

²² <http://www.cbiraq.org/DataValues.aspx?dtFrm=10/31/2003&dtTo=02/18/2019&tMId=175&dtformat=MMM,yyyy>

²³ Aawsat, Jan 13, 2020, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2080356/worsening-conditions-bring-lebanese-back-streets>

²⁴ Aljazeera, Jan 3, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/lebanon-20-25bn-bailout-economy-minister-200103150342245.html>



- Salim Sfeir, chairman of the Association of Banks in Lebanon and chief executive of Bank of Beirut, Lebanon's sovereign debt is probably going to be restructured in a way that neither the depositors nor the government will be affected.²⁵
- The Lebanese Central bank asked for extra powers in standardizing controls and relationships with commercial banks.²⁶
- There are growing concerns among Lebanese citizens and hospital staff that there might be a shortage in medical equipment in the coming months.²⁷
- The Banking Supervision Committee requested during January information about transfers to Swiss banks from Lebanon.²⁸
- After one month of political vacuum, a new "expert" government was finally formed on the 21st of January, to address the deteriorating economic conditions of the country. However, it faced severe criticism from many Lebanese citizens and movement leaders, resulting to demonstrations and violence on the streets.²⁹
- Unemployment is continuously on the rise, as more Lebanese lose their jobs.³⁰
- 1507.5 LBP/ USD Lebanon official currency exchange rate.³¹

Palestine

- Israel deducted \$43 million USD from the taxes it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, causing an uproar within the latter.³²
- According to Xinhua news agency, the Israeli government's decision to deduct millions of dollars from Palestinian tax revenues will only increase the financial crisis in Palestine in 2020.³³

²⁵ Reuters, Jan 13, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy-banker/lebanon-will-probably-restructure-debt-foreigners-will-be-paid-senior-banker-idUSKBN1ZC1XH>

²⁶ Reuters, Jan 12, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy-salameh/lebanon-central-bank-seeks-extra-powers-wants-controls-standardized-idUSKBN1ZB075>

²⁷ Aljazeera, Jan 12, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/lebanon-risk-medicine-shortage-economic-crisis-200112122636051.html>

²⁸ LBC group, Jan 14, 2020, <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/d/lebanon/495066/>

²⁹ Deutsche Welle, January 22, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/lebanon-announces-new-expert-government/a-52102252>

³⁰ Memri, January 2020, <https://www.memri.org/reports/journalists-lebanese-al-nahar-daily-pointed-criticism-countrys-leaders-your-corruption-has>

³¹ <http://www.bdl.gov.lb/>

³² Imemc, Dec 31, 2019, <https://imemc.org/article/palestinian-fm-systematic-economic-war-waged-by-the-israeli-occupation/>

³³ Xinhua Net, Jan 7, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-01/07/c_138683124.htm



- Japan signed Four Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) agreements worth 344,371 USD, that will benefit hospitals and municipalities in Palestine.³⁴
- Before Prince Charles's visit to Israel, a group of UK MPs called for the UK to recognize the state of Palestine.³⁵
- Tens of thousands of Palestinians and Jordanians rallied in protests against the announcement of the U.S. peace plan, known as "deal of the century. Also Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, categorically rejected the deal claiming that Jerusalem is not for sale and labeling it as a conspiracy.³⁶

Syria

- The Syrian authorities have announced new penalties for dealing with foreign currencies, and closed more than a dozen foreign exchange companies. However it offered a more attractive rate to buy dollars. Yet, these moves have little chance of stopping the free-fall of the Syrian pound.³⁷
- Dozens of civilians gathered in Al-Seer Square in As-Suwayda Governorate at the city of As-Suwayda to protest the living conditions.³⁸
- The Syrian Investment Agency has issued a license for a new car assembly plant, while an Iranian-owned venture in the industry has reportedly suspended production which reflects Syria's Economic Difficulties.³⁹
- On December 12, the government announced on its official website that from February 01 it will start selling sugar, rice and tea at subsidized prices through a smart card system.⁴⁰
- Syria's free trade zones recorded a decrease in their activity in 2019, a worrying development given the low base of economic activity at the start of the year.⁴¹
- Syria has awarded a Russian company a new offshore oil exploration contract as part of a set of new investment and trade agreements between the two countries.⁴²
- The Syrian parliament has ratified an agreement that will see the opening of a Syrian trading house in South Ossetia and a similar South Ossetian trading house in Damascus.⁴³
- Current Exchange Rate in Black Market: 1050 - 1100 SP/US

³⁴ <http://english.wafa.ps/page.aspx?i>

³⁵ Arab News, Jan 21, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1615781/middle-east>

³⁶ Anadolu Agency, January 28, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/jerusalem-red-line-for-muslims/protests-erupt-in-palestine-jordan-against-us-plan/1717145>

³⁷ <https://www.syria-report.com/trending-content/Central%20Bank%20of%20Syria>

³⁸ <https://syria.liveuamap.com/en/2020/15-january-dozens-of-civilians-gathered-in-alseer-square>

³⁹ <https://www.syria-report.com/trending-content/SIAMCO>

⁴⁰ <https://www.syria-report.com/news/16>

⁴¹ <https://www.syria-report.com/trending-content/SIAMCO>

⁴² <https://www.syria-report.com/>

⁴³ <https://www.syria-report.com/news/16>



Cyprus

- Cyprus ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Stavros Avgoustides convened with Chairman of the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce to discuss future Saudi investments within Cyprus.⁴⁴
- According to Cyprus Mail, in 2020 Cypriots who spend 14.7 per cent of their income on transportation, will be affected by the hike in oil prices.⁴⁵
- Cyprus Deputy Ministry of Tourism submitted a 10-year strategic plan to the cabinet, aiming to make Cyprus amongst the world's top 30 tourist destinations.⁴⁶
- Greece, Cyprus and Israel signed a deal for an undersea pipeline to transfer gas to Europe from the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴⁷
- 1.1 USD Euro official currency value⁴⁸

3. THE REFUGEE SITUATION (Updated)

Egypt

- In January, several countries made contributions for the sake of the UNHCR in Egypt. They included UK (\$4,193,971), Italy (\$7,985,748), Germany (\$128,142), and Turkey (\$300,000).⁴⁹
- According to the UNHCR's funding update, UNHCR Egypt has so far received 7% of the 108 million USD funding it requires.⁵⁰
- In a report published in the beginning of this year, there are signs of growing abuse and violence against migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan countries.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Cyprus, January 9, 2020, <https://in-cyprus.com/saudi-arabias-investment-plans-include-cyprus/>

⁴⁵ Cyprus Mail, Jan 8, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/01/08/cypriots-the-fourth-highest-spenders-on-transportation-in-eu/>

⁴⁶ Financial Mirror, Jan. 9, 2020, <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/01/09/cyprus-aims-to-become-a-top-30-tourist-destination/>

⁴⁷ Deutsche Welle, Jan 3, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/israel-greece-and-cyprus-sign-gas-pipeline-deal/av-51876093>

⁴⁸ https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-usd.en.html

⁴⁹ <http://reporting.unhcr.org/egypt>

⁵⁰ <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Egypt%20Funding%20Update%2008%20January%202020.pdf>

⁵¹ Info Migrants, Jan 2, 2020, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/21862/sub-saharan-migrants-in-egypt-subject-to-increasing-abuse-and-violence>



Jordan

The UNHCR states that there are currently 654,692 registered refugees in Jordan up until the beginning of January.

The proportion of Syrian displaced people registered within the UNHCR for January, are distributed as follows:

- 192,993 in Amman Governorate (29.5 %)
 - 161,977 in Mafraq Governorate (24.8%)
 - 134,649 in Irbid Governorate (20.6%)
 - 94,664 in Zarqa Governorate (14.5%)
 - 18,482 in Balqa Governorate (2.8%)
 - 13,114 in Madaba Governorate (2%)
 - 9,312 in Jarash Governorate (1.4%)
 - 8,553 in Karak Governorate (1.3%)
 - 8,330 in Maan Governorate (1.3%)
 - 6,575 in Ajlun Governorate (1.0%)
 - 3,615 in Aqaba Governorate (0.6%)
 - 1,721 in Tafilah Governorate (0.3%)
- The Emirates Red Crescent began implementation of its winterization project worth 15 million AED.⁵²
 - His Majesty King Abdullah, during an interview with France 24, reminded the world that Jordan is facing immense challenges forced by the Syrian refugee epidemic.⁵³

Iraq

The UNHCR states that there are currently 245,810 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq.

The proportion of displaced Syrian people registered within the UNHCR up until the beginning of January, are distributed as follows:

- 124,182 in Erbil (50.6%)
- 88,251 in Dahuk (35.9%)
- 29,282 in Sulaymaniyah (12.4%)
- 1,137 in Anbar (0.5%)

⁵² Relief Web, Jan 8, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/erc-begins-winter-aid-campaign-refugees-jordan-0>

⁵³ Zawya, Jan 14, 2020,

https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/economy/story/We_want_a_better_life_for_Jordan__King_Abdullah-SNG_164473552/



➤ 1,729 in other areas (0.8%)⁵⁴

- The UNHCR has announced that Netherlands had donated 5.6 million USD to aid those displaced in Iraq.⁵⁵
- Iraq's Ministry of Migration and Displaced announced on the 2nd of January that 35 million Iraqi Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) returned to their homes in 2019.⁵⁶
- Marta Ruedas, the Humanitarian Coordinator for the United Nations in Iraq, expressed her deep concern about bureaucratic constraints that reduced humanitarian access to 2.4 million Iraqis in need of assistance.⁵⁷

Lebanon

Since the beginning of January, the number of registered refugees in Lebanon is 914,648.

Refugees in Lebanon are distributed as follows:

- 344,285 in Bekaa (37.6%)
 - 242,354 in North Lebanon (26.5%)
 - 224,149 in Beirut (24.5%)
 - 103,860 in South Lebanon (11.4%)⁵⁸
- On the 23rd of January, Abu-Dhabi hosted a “dream ball” that raised funds to improve the health and well-being of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.⁵⁹
 - Around 1400 Syrian refugees departed from Lebanon to Syria at the end of December.⁶⁰
 - Syrian refugees are continuously fleeing the country as economic conditions continue to deteriorate.⁶¹

⁵⁴ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5>

⁵⁵ Rudaw, Dec. 26, 2019, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/261220193>

⁵⁶ Rudaw, Jan 2, 2020, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/010120204>

⁵⁷ Relief Web, Jan 16, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/united-nations-extremely-concerned-about-impact-bureaucratic-constraints-leading-reduced>

⁵⁸ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

⁵⁹ Mena Fn, January 13, 2020 <https://menafn.com/1099546624/Abu-Dhabi-Dream-Ball-2020-Aims-to-Raise-Funds-to-Improve-Health-and-Well-being-of-74000-Syrian-Refugees>

⁶⁰ Xinhuanet, Dec. 26, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/26/c_138659909.htm

⁶¹ The New Humanitarian, Jan 9, 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/1/9/Lebanon-financial-crisis-Syrian-refugees>



- 2,726 Syrian refugees and the host local community, have benefited from the Phase 1 of the thermal insulation of Syrian refugee tents, which was implemented by Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS).⁶²

Syria

Humanitarian situation:

- The scale of humanitarian needs in Syria will remain vast in 2020, with an estimated 11 million civilians projected to require assistance on a regular basis and 5 million in acute need of help.
- Each day, nearly 4,500 children are forced to flee their homes, with many having been displaced multiple times already. More than least 140,000 children have been displaced because of heavy violence in and around Idlib in the northwest.⁶³

Northwest: Increased hostilities

- Since 1 December 2019, almost 350,000 people fled from their homes mostly from southern parts of Idlib area, 80 percent of whom are women and children, mainly from southern Idlib governorate, moving further north away from the hostilities.
- 4 million people live in northwest Syria, of which 2.8 are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance. Women and children are estimated to make up for the 76 percent of this population.⁶⁴
- Some 45,000 of newly displaced individuals chose to move to areas in northern Aleppo governorate to seek safety and to reach services.⁶⁵
- Most of the recently displaced people moved to urban centers and IDP camps in northwestern Idlib. Tens of thousands have reportedly moved to areas such as Afrin and A'zaz in northern Aleppo governorate seeking safety and access to services.⁶⁶
- Between 29 April, 2019 and 5 January, 2020, OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) recorded the deaths of 1,460 civilians, including 417 children, as a result of the military escalation in Idlib, Hama and Aleppo.
- 33,817 school-aged children's learning affected due hostilities.

⁶² Relief Web, Jan 1, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/qrcs-rehabilitates-tents-syrian-refugees-lebanon-enar>

⁶³ Unicef, 02 Jan

⁶⁴ OCHA, Jan 15, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-recent-developments-northwestern-syria-situation-12>

⁶⁵ OCHA, Jan 15, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-recent-developments-northwestern-syria-situation-12>

⁶⁶ OCHA, Jan 15, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-recent-developments-northwestern-syria-situation-12>



- 25,611 Children under the age of 5 years are displaced.⁶⁷

Northeast: Serious situation

- The Spokesperson for the Secretary-General said on 1 Jan that that the health sector is the one most affected by the suspension of the Al Yarubiyah border crossing in north-east, That WHO estimates that health service availability will be reduced in the medium term, and that gaps cannot yet be met through the other mechanisms. Services that are expected to be most affected include child health; reproductive health; secondary health care, including trauma care; mental health; and nutrition.⁶⁸
- 12 organizations were expecting to receive funding in 2020 from UN regional agencies, to a total sum of \$10 million.⁶⁹

Population movements

- 129,041 people have returned to their areas of origin.⁷⁰
- With the continued drastic drops in temperatures, women and girls are adversely affected by the cold weather as there are dire needs for NFIs that will protect them from the weather.
- In recent weeks, three new informal IDP settlements have been established: Tweineh (hosting an estimated 4,120 people), Tal-Samen (estimated 20 people) and Daham (estimated 1,800 people).
- Humanitarian actors have diverted programs and resources to respond to protection needs of newly displaced populations in Tal Tamer, Al-Hasakeh, Areesha camp, Mahmoudli camp, Ar-Raqqa city and surrounding areas.⁷¹

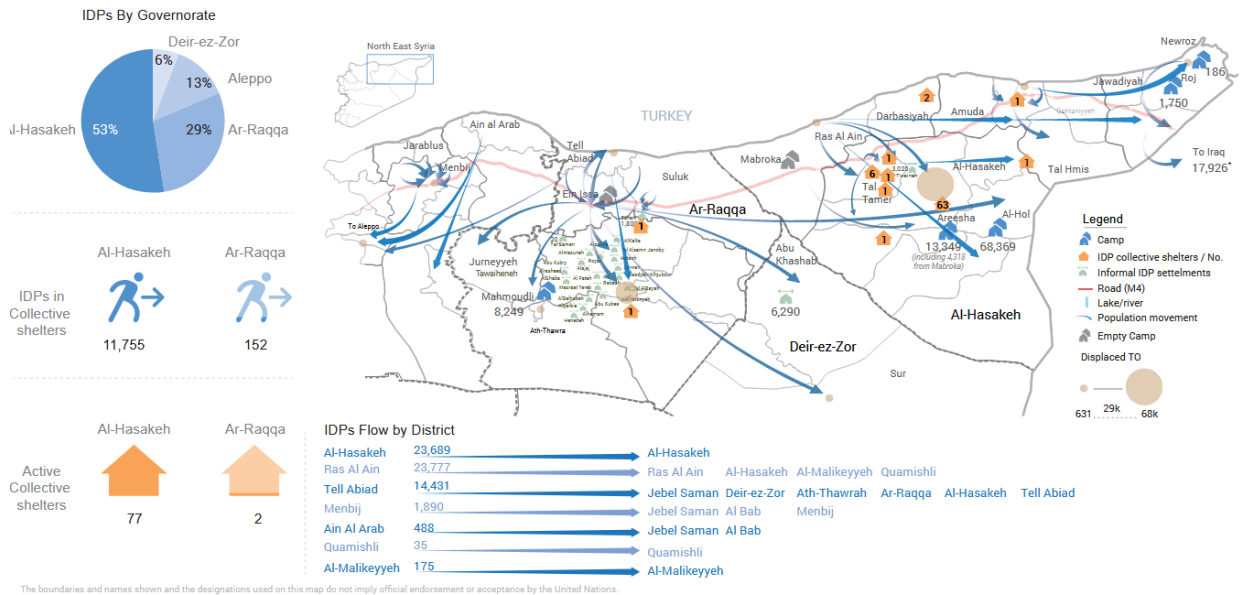
⁶⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-recent-developments-northwestern-syria-situation-12>

⁶⁸ UN, noon briefings, 16 Jan

⁶⁹ ACT, Cross Border Resolution | Impact and Considerations | Jan 2020

⁷⁰ Relief Web, Jan 6, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNFPA%20North-East%20Syria%20Flash%20Update%20%2311%20-%202022%20December%202019%20-%2004th%20January%202020.pdf>

⁷¹ Relief Web, Jan 4, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNFPA%20North-East%20Syria%20Flash%20Update%20%2311%20-%202022%20December%202019%20-%2004th%20January%202020.pdf>



North East Syria reported returns

- An estimated 129,041 displaced people are reported to have returned to their places of origin. Of these, 118,936 have returned to Al Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa, including: 18,200 to Qamishli, 7,625 to Tal Tamer, 8,425 to Al-Malikeyyeh, 42,869 to Ras Al Ain and 41,817 to Tal Abyad in Ar-Raqqa.
- Of these returnees, an estimated 50,000 people have returned to areas currently under Turkish control. In Aleppo 10,105 have returned, mainly to Menbij.⁷²

Challenges in shelters

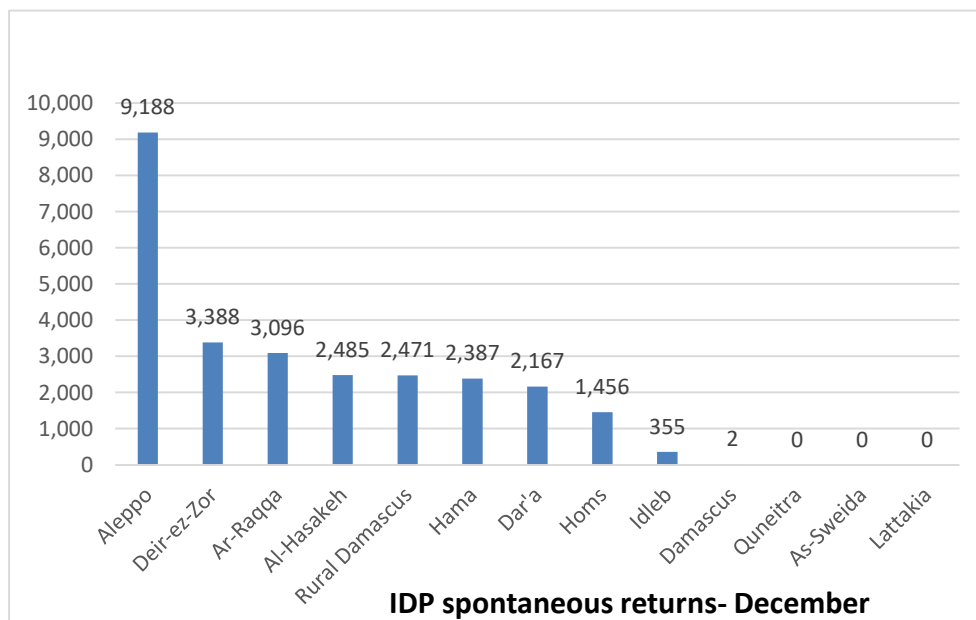
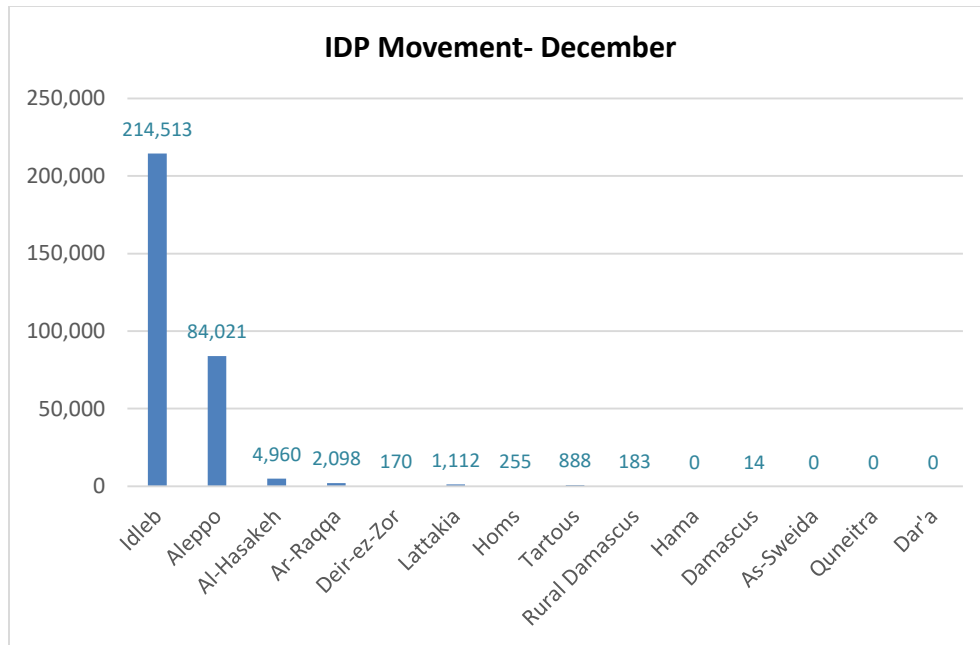
The continued challenges in NES collective shelters include: overcrowding, insufficient supply of winterized clothes to meet the needs, lack of drinking water, GBV and protection concerns such as lack of adequate lighting and common WASH facilities in shelters. Additionally, poor living conditions in collective shelters and lack of livelihood opportunities further put women in protection risks including GBV.⁷³

⁷² OCHA, 18 Dec 2019

⁷³ UNFPA, 04 Jan 2020



IDP movements and spontaneous IDP returns for December 2019.⁷⁴



⁷⁴ OCHA, HDX tools, Data and resource



Table-Origin_vs_Departure

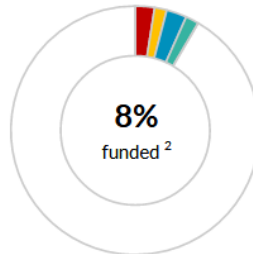
IDPs Origin to Destination Movements											
From To →	Aleppo	Al-Hasakeh	Ar-Raqqa	Damascus	Deir-ez-Zor	Homs	Idleb	Lattakia	Rural Damascus	Tartous	Grand Total
Aleppo	2,133			6				123		135	2,397
Al-Hasakeh		4,790			60	3					4,853
Ar-Raqqa		170	2,098		25						2,293
Damascus								39		90	129
Dar'a				8							8
Deir-ez-Zor					85	3					88
Hama								71		74	145
Homs						16		62	14	85	177
Idleb	81,888						214,513	81			296,482
Lattakia								671		135	806
Rural Damascus						233			169	59	461
Tartous								65		310	375
Grand Total	84,021	4,960	2,098	14	170	255	214,513	1,112	183	888	308,214

IDP Returnees Origin to Destination Movements											
From To →	Aleppo	Al-Hasakeh	Ar-Raqqa	Damascus	Dar'a	Deir-ez-Zor	Hama	Homs	Idleb	Rural Damascus	Grand Total
Aleppo	7,755		2,800						5		10,560
Al-Hasakeh	6	2,455	125			1,393					3,979
Ar-Raqqa	503		131								634
As-Sweida				2	13					97	112
Damascus		30				515				223	768
Dar'a					2,073						2,073
Deir-ez-Zor						1,480					1,480
Hama			40				2,094	49	274		2,457
Homs	4							514			518
Idleb	920						293		76		1,289
Lattakia								14			14
Quneitra					81						81
Rural Damascus								651		2,151	2,802
Tartous								228			228
Grand Total	9,188	2,485	3,096	2	2,167	3,388	2,387	1,456	355	2,471	26,995



FUNDING UPDATE | 2020

\$ 2.015 billion
UNHCR's financial requirements 2020 ¹



**SYRIA SITUATION
RESPONSE**
as of 8 January 2020

- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)

CONTRIBUTIONS ³ | USD

	■ Unearmarked	■ Softly earmarked	■ Earmarked	■ Tightly earmarked	Total
Germany	-	55,761,389	-	-	55,761,389
European Union	-	-	-	20,284,026	20,284,026
United Kingdom	-	-	-	11,842,031	11,842,031
Australia	-	-	5,084,746	-	5,084,746
Netherlands	-	-	4,912,242	-	4,912,242
Ireland	-	-	1,650,165	-	1,650,165
Denmark	-	-	-	1,516,799	1,516,799
Monaco	-	-	-	238,949	238,949
Czechia	-	-	-	211,298	211,298
Falcon Trading Group	-	200,000	-	-	200,000
Miscellaneous private donors	-	-	-	72,222	72,222
Sub-total	-	55,961,389	11,647,153	34,165,324	101,773,865
Indicative allocation of funds and adjustments	34,470,081	(2,762,348)	20,256,451	16,137,171	68,101,355
Total	34,470,081	53,199,040	31,903,604	50,302,495	169,875,220

- The Government of Japan has contributed \$2.8 million to UNICEF's emergency response for the most vulnerable children and families in northeast Syria. The contribution will ensure that over half a million people, including families in camps, collective shelters and host communities can benefit from improved access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services.⁷⁵

Cyprus

- The Cypriot coastal guard intercepted a ship carrying 101 Syrians off the coast.⁷⁶
- Cyprus recently issued Coupons valued between €320 and €735 monthly to third-country nationals in Cyprus who have applied for international protection of recognized political refugee status or as a beneficiary of subsidiary protection.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ UNICEF, 16 Jan

⁷⁶ Aawsat, Jan 14, 2020, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2082526/cyprus-intercepts-boat-101-syrians-board>

⁷⁷ In Cyprus, Jan 13, 2020, <https://in-cyprus.com/coupons-worth-millions-for-political-refugees-in-cyprus/>



- A series of legal moves to force the state to compensate refugees of the 1974 Turkish invasion, was made by a former supreme court judge.⁷⁸

4. CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Egypt

- Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities announced that Old Cairo's "Hanging Church", the Church of Virgin Mary in Samanound, and The Church of the Martyrs Sergius and Bacchus were reopened after restoration works.⁷⁹
- His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Holy See of St. Mark, presided over the Christmas Mass in the New Administrative Capital, where officials from government ministries, governors, parliamentarians and public figures attended.⁸⁰
- His Holiness Pope Tawadros II inaugurated St. Shenouda Church in Tahta, Sohag during his visit to the area.⁸¹

Jordan

- His Majesty King Abdullah convened with church leaders from Jordan and Jerusalem, and a number of Christian figures, on the occasion of Christmas, at the Baptism Site Conference Centre at Bethany beyond the Jordan. During the meeting His Beatitude Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem Theophilos III, who was present at the meeting, stressed the importance of supporting His Majesty's attempt to secure Hashemite Custodianship over Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.⁸²
- The Catholic Churches in Jordan marked the twentieth Christian pilgrimage day to the site of the Baptism of Christ (Al-Maghtas), where more than 5000 pilgrims participated.⁸³

⁷⁸ Cyprus Mail, Jan 19, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/01/19/legal-moves-to-compensate-1974-refugees/>

⁷⁹ Egypt Independent, Jan. 9, 2020, <https://egyptindependent.com/churches-restored-along-path-following-holy-familys-journey-across-egypt-minister/>

⁸⁰ Egypt Independent, January 6, 2020, <https://egyptindependent.com/pope-tawadros-ii-to-lead-christmas-mass-in-egypts-new-administrative-capital/>

⁸¹ <https://www.youm7.com/story/2020/1/15>

⁸² Jordan Times, Jan 14, 2020, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/king-meets-church-leaders-jordan-jerusalem-and-christian-figures-occasion-eastern>

⁸³ <https://ammannet.net/>



Iraq

- His Holiness Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans and head of the Chaldean Catholic Church, described the situation of the assassination of Iran's top military leader as a "volcano about to erupt", asking both Muslims and Christians for peace in the Middle East.⁸⁴
- His Holiness Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, during the Christmas holidays proposed forming a unified Christian party with one strategy, aiming to have more influence on the politics of the country.⁸⁵
- Msgr. Bashar Warda, Archbishop of Erbil, expressed his concern about a probable displacement of a new wave of Christians due to the confrontation between the US and Iran.⁸⁶

Lebanon

- The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, during the first of January, stressed the importance of accelerating the formation of a rescue government that implements the aspirations of the Lebanese and is able to respond to the desire of the President of the Republic, to fight corruption and recover the country from the current situation.⁸⁷
- HB Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi, during January held a series of meetings with various religious and political leaders to discuss the urgent situation in Lebanon. For instance, he convened with the Lebanese Governor of the Banque du Liban, Riad Salameh who detailed the financial position of the country. His Beatitude, from his end, stressed on the importance of forming a government as soon as possible.⁸⁸
- HB Patriarch Youssef el Absi, The Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, visited the Church of Saint George in Radwanayah, Egypt where he conducted a mass, as part of his visit to the Chairs of Alexandria.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Christian Today, Jan 7, 2020, <https://christiantoday.com/article/iraq-church-leader-fears-for-country-after-qasem-soleimanis-death/133977.htm>

⁸⁵ FSSPX, January 10, 2020, <https://fsspx.news/en/news-events/news/iraq-cardinal-sako-militates-creation-christian-party-54153>

⁸⁶ Adnki, Jan 10, 2020, <https://www.adnki.net/AKI/?p=54285>

⁸⁷ Annahar, Jan 3, 2020, <https://newspaper.annahar.com/article/1096465>

⁸⁸ Lebanon Debate, Jan 10, 2020, <https://www.lebanondebate.com/news/465652>

⁸⁹<https://www.youm7.com/>



Palestine

- HE Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sebastian Greek Orthodox, after being hospitalized from a malevolent poisoning, thanked the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, the hospital crew in Jerusalem, Jordan and its king, the hospital crew in Jordan, and the thousands of citizens who visited him to check up on him.⁹⁰
- Palestinian rights activists succeeded in getting an apology from a show named “Jeopardy” which considered that the Church of Nativity is in Israel.⁹¹
- HE Atallah Hanna categorically rejected “the deal of the century” claiming that Palestinians will not accept surrender.⁹²

Syria

- HB Patriarch John X, The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, received Russian President Vladimir Putin and Syrian President Bashaar El Assad at the Mariamite Cathedral of Damascus.⁹³
- During January HH Patriarch Mar Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of the Syriac Orthodox, presided over the Holy Qurobo on the occasion of the New Year at St. Mark Cathedral in New Jersey, the meeting of the Board of Trustees of Antioch Syrian University, at the Patriarchate Headquarters in Bab Touma – Damascus, and the Holy Qurobo celebrated by Rev. Fr. Youhanon Yaacoub, at St. Mary Church in Damascus.⁹⁴

Cyprus

- Education Minister Prodromos Prodromou and Archbishop Chrystostomos convened to discuss the possibility of including anti-drug messages as part of religious studies in the school curricula.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Alwatan Voice, Jan 3, 2020, <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2020/01/03/1304209.html>

⁹¹ The Blaze, January 14, 2020, <https://www.theblaze.com/news/jeopardy-caves-to-social-media-outrage-apologizes-for-ruling-that-famous-church-in-bethlehem-is-located-in-israel-and-not-palestine>

⁹² Albawab News, Jan 29, 2020, <https://www.albawabhnews.com/3884023>

⁹³ Memri, Jan 13, 2020, <https://www.memri.org/reports/russia-week-%E2%80%93-focus-russia%E2%80%99s-bilateral-relations-%E2%80%93-january-13-2020>

⁹⁴ <https://syriacpatriarchate.org/>

⁹⁵ Cyprus Mail, Dec. 24, 2019, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/12/24/church-and-state-want-more-anti-drugs-messages-in-schools/>



5. MECC HEADQUARTERS ACTIVITIES

MECC visits Bkerki (Jan. 10)

Representing MECC, Dr. Souraya Bechealany, Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches and Ms. Manal Bechara, Head of MECC's Finance Department visited HB Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi at Bkerki, the episcopal see of the Maronite Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch of the Maronite Church in Lebanon.

Dr. Souraya shared with His Beatitude the preparations that are being made for the Executive Committee meeting, that will be held during the month of January.



Dr. Souraya Bechealany and Ms. Manal Bechara, with His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi at Bkerki, January 10, 2020, Photo Credit: Bkerki



The Executive Committee in Cyprus (January 21-22)



Executive Committee Jan 21-22,2020, Photo Credit: MECC website

Over the course of two days (January 21 – 22/ 2020), the Executive Committee held its regular meeting in Larnaca – Cyprus. The meeting was generously hosted by His Beatitude Chrysostomos II, Archbishop of Nova Justiniana and All Cyprus of the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus. The members of the Executive Committee who participated in the meeting came from Cyprus, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine.

The meeting was presided over by His Beatitude Youhanna X - Patriarch of Antioch and All the East for the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and president of the Council for the Greek Orthodox Family, by His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II - Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church who is the president of the Council for the Eastern Orthodox Family, by His Beatitude Mar Louis Raphael Sako – Patriarch of Babylon for Chaldeans and president of the Council for the Catholic family, and by Right Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, President of the National Evangelical Union Lebanon and president of the Council for the Evangelical Family.



This meeting is held in the midst of a period full of painful events and suffering plaguing our Middle Eastern countries. The Executive Committee members are fully aware of the suffering, afflictions and challenges faced by the people in the region as well as by Churches. They contemplated the divine affection of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His unparalleled love for humanity. They call on Christian believers in the Middle East to hold on to their faith and hope and believe that God is among us, supports us and engages us in His divine life. They also urge the Member Churches of the Council to be fully present next



Dr. Souraya Bechealany presenting the General Secretariat's report as well as the activities of the Council's departments and all related institutions, Jan 21, 2020, Photo Credit: MECC website.

to every refugee and displaced person who is in pain after losing his family, friends or properties due to violence and war so that the churches remain an icon of divine affection and spaciousness.

After the opening prayer, the agenda was approved, and the minutes of the Executive Committee's meeting held at the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch (Atchaneh - Bickfaya – Lebanon/22-23 January 2019) were adopted.

Based on the discussions, mainly focusing on the challenges faced by Christians in the Middle East and their partners in citizenship, the Executive Committee stressed the following:



- 1- Promote the ecumenical cooperation between the Middle East churches on theological, social services and media levels in order confirm their choice of unity in the witness of Jesus Christ that have risen.
- 2- Pray for the discovery of the fate of their Eminences Archbishop Boulous Yazigi and Archbishop Youhanna Ibrahim who have been kidnapped in April 2013, and request the international conscience to work for their safe return and to allow them to continue their mission that is focused on peace building and human dignity.
- 3- The escalation of tension in the Middle East and the Arab World requires prayer and work for peace and new initiatives to counter waves of extremism in order to preserve peace in the society, protect human dignity and pave the way for wise dialogue and conflict resolution while rejecting violence and war.
- 4- The popular movement that Iraq is witnessing, calls for an active contribution to achieve social justice, economic integrity, good governance, national sovereignty and entrench the principles of accountability and the fight against corruption through a fair judiciary system.
- 5- The exacerbation of the Syrian people's suffering requires the deployment of intensive efforts in all sectors to lift the embargo, promote the path of peace building and the restoration of security, and to work hard to ensure the appropriate conditions that will allow the return of refugees and displaced people to their land.
- 6- Recognize the efforts of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan that has been entrusted with the protection of Christian and Muslim sacred sites in the holy city of Jerusalem as well as the strengthening of Christian presence in cooperation with churches. In addition to that, it has been working for the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue and living together in citizenship.
- 7- The participants pray for the Lebanon that is witnessing masses protests carried out by the Lebanese people demanding a decent living and the good management of their common resources; so that Lebanon, the "Message", regains its cultural role as a model of pluralism for common good and as an example of responsible freedom.
- 8- Support all efforts to restore the unity of Cyprus in order to unify the Cypriot people, promote regional and international peace, and put an end to the occupation that has caused the division of the island.
- 9- Continuously support churches in Palestine and recognize the people's resilience despite their suffering in the face of occupation, segregation and colonization. Call for the respect of the freedom of religion for all Palestinians including Christians and Muslims, and the respect of the legal and historic status-quo regarding the fact that East Jerusalem is the capital of a viable independent Palestinian state.
- 10- The Egyptian people have always aspired to consolidate the path of citizenship, free from extremism and isolation. They are coexisting to promote the living together which leads us to confirm that they are collectively aware of the positive consequences that it stores in their country.
- 11- The fact that people in the region are calling for a complete citizenship based equal rights and duties, and diversity, requires a review of the systems and laws. This proves that there is an urgent need



to formulate a path which emphasizes on understanding unity in diversity while considering that diversity is richness, away from sectarian and factional exhortations and all forms of intolerance.

12- The poverty and the marginalization that some classes of society in the region suffer from call all states and ecclesial institutions to design developmental sustainable policies that ensure a decent life for every human being and that contribute to social justice and economic prosperity.

13- The MECC calls on Christians in this blessed Middle East to hold on to their lands, their heritage and their identity with faith and hope, and to enhance their role in consolidating living together, mutual respect and social solidarity.

14- The ongoing refugee and displacement crisis require intensive efforts from the international community especially the United Nations and faith-based organizations, to facilitate the return of these refugees and displaced people to their countries of origin while offering them a decent and protecting their identity and civilization. This situation also requires providing constant support for host communities and ensuring resilience components as well as the protection of refugees and displaced people until their safe return.

15- Ensure active coordination and communication in preparation of the General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches that is expected to be held between the 16th and 19th of September 2020 in Lebanon. It will be entitled "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." (Matthew 14:27) and will be generously hosted by His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rai - Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East – in Bkerki.

In conclusion, the MECC Executive Committee Members thank His Beatitude Chrysostomos II and the Greek Orthodox Church in Cyprus for generously hosting this meeting and thank Our Lord Jesus Christ, that gathers His Church through His love. The MECC Executive Committee Members are confident that the churches of the Middle East weren't and will never be alone in their witness, while renewing their faith in the promise of God "I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20). We also believe that the path towards the 12th General Assembly will embody the common witness of the Churches and will shed light from a realistic and prophetic perspective, on the role of Christians in the suffering Middle East especially in the fight for human dignity. This requires the solidarity of the leaders as well as a solid cooperation to guarantee a bright future suitable for the Middle East and its value, where diversity is a model of living together.



6. MECC Humanitarian activities January 2020:

Lebanon

- Completed 6 Health Awareness sessions on reproductive health and vaccination for 50 women in South Lebanon
- Held group awareness sessions on GBV and its effects, for 144 women and 63 men.
- Completed 9 PSS sessions for 36 women,
- Completed 20 PSS sessions for 48 children.
- Completed 80 hours of home care training at Balamand University – Faculty of Health Sciences at their Main Campus in Koura/North Lebanon for 15 Lebanese and Syrians.
- Completed food security projects in the form of 4 sessions in 5 villages of the Akkar Governorate about marketing products and projects management.
- Completed 3 soft skills sessions of crochet as part of the MHGBV program in Mount Lebanon.



Health Awareness session in South Lebanon, January, 2020, photo credit: Diakonia



GBV sessions for men and women in Mount Lebanon, January 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



Psychosocial activities for children in Mount Lebanon, January 2020, photo credit: Diakonia



Syria

- Completed the remedial classes' courses for 250 students in Lattakia and Jableh.
- Completed the rehabilitation of two medical centers and two gardens in Damascus rural.
- Completed the distribution of barley seeds kits for 600 beneficiaries in Daraa governorate, including plowing indemnity.
- Completed the distribution of 1800 winter adult jackets and 3596 children winter clothing kits to 1735 families in several villages in Daraa governorate.
- Provided tuition fees support to 124 students in Aleppo and Qamishly.
- Continuation of providing grants to 40 skilled workers in Maarba and Daraa AlBalad.
- Launched tender process to purchase 1200 children winter clothing kits and hygiene kits and 1550 school kits.
- Launched tender process to select contractors to rehabilitate 4 public schools in Aleppo and Damascus rural.
- Launched tender process to purchase cattle fodder for 400 beneficiaries in Daraa governorate.
- Prepared to conduct labor market assessment in Izraa and Sheikh Maskin in Daraa governorate.



Distribution of winter clothing kits to 1735 families in Dara'a, January 2020, Photo Credit: Diakonia



Distribution of barley seeds for 600 families in Dara'a, January 2020, Photo Credit: Diakonia



Figure 1

Tuition fees support for 124 students in Aleppo and Qamishly, January 2020, Photo Credit: Diakonia



7. CONCLUSION

While the peoples of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and the rest of the ME are gasping their final breaths, the dwindling economy continues to tighten its grip. The MECC, from its end, is not sparing any of its resources to tend to the crisis. Yet it alone can only do so much. Therefore, to reiterate what was presented in January's overview: We are in an emergency situation and are in dire need of every scrap of help, to avoid further deterioration and venturing into an unknown doomful fate.