

[FROM THE FIELD: Living a life in the ruins of Syria](#)

Many people in Syria are trying to lead “a normal life amidst the ruins” of their country devastated by years of conflict; that’s according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, [Filippo Grandi](#), who visited the Syrian city of Douma this week.

Some 5.6 million people have fled Syrian over the past seven years of war and a further 6.6 million people are displaced inside the country.

Mr. Grandi walked the streets of Douma on Thursday and met people who are living in the rubble of destroyed homes.

The UN Refugee Agency continues to support people across the country with relief items. It has also funded the rehabilitation of vital infrastructure such as schools and health clinics.

[Read more here](#) on Mr Grandi’s visit.

[Refugees overcrowded to ‘boiling point’; on Greek island, warns UN agency](#)

The Government of Greece has been urged by the United Nations to do more to help thousands of asylum-seekers and migrants who have been “crammed” into island reception centres, amid reports that children have tried to take their own lives there.

The [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR), which [issued the appeal](#) on Friday, described the centres as “squalid, inadequate and rapidly deteriorating”.

Levels of overcrowding on some islands are on a par with March 2016, when arrival rates were far higher than they are now.

The majority of those seeking shelter are from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the UN agency.

It has warned that hundreds of unaccompanied boys and girls are particularly at risk, along with dozens of pregnant women, newborns and survivors of

sexual violence.

More than 3,000 asylum-seekers on the islands have been given permission to move to the mainland, but transfers “have been slow”, UNHCR says, owing to a lack of accommodation and reception facilities.

“The situation is reaching boiling point at the Moria RIC on the island of Lesbos,” UNHCR spokesperson Charlie Yaxley said, referring to the Reception and Identification Centres (RIC) used to house new arrivals.

“More than 7,000 asylum-seekers and migrants are crammed into shelters built to accommodate just 2,000 people,” he added. “A quarter of those are children.”

There are similar overcrowding levels on another Greek island, Samos, where some 2,700 mainly Syrian and Iraqi families are staying in a facility that was originally designed to hold around 700 people.

On the islands of Chios and Kos, meanwhile, reception centres are at close to double their intended capacity.

“This is likely to become a serious concern if not addressed before winter sets in,” Mr. Yaxley told journalists, before warning of other urgent needs.

“We are particularly concerned about woefully inadequate sanitary facilities, fighting amongst frustrated communities, rising levels of sexual harassment and assaults and the increasing need for medical and psycho-social care,” he said, noting that increasing numbers of people – “including children” – have been displaying signs of mental health problems.

So far this month, around 800 asylum-seekers have been moved to the Greece’s mainland.

But this has failed to ease the pressure on the island reception facilities, as the number of arrivals has increased to an average of 114 per day, up from 83 in July.

To help reduce delays in transporting vulnerable people to the Greek mainland, UNHCR will continue to assist in the process next month.

“We do encourage the Greek authorities, who have received European funding for this situation, to address these challenges and to accelerate the procedure and measures to decongest the island as soon as possible,” Mr. Yaxley said.

Latest data from UNHCR indicates that so far this year, around 19,000 vulnerable people have reached the Greek islands from Turkey. In 2015, the number was more than 850,000.

“It’s a very manageable situation, it’s a question of political will,” Mr. Yaxley told journalists in Geneva, in an appeal for European Union countries to show solidarity with those in need of international protection.

[Security Council extends mandate of UN Interim Force in Lebanon for a year](#)

In a unanimous action, the United Nations Security Council extended the mandate of the Organization's peacekeeping mission in Lebanon until 31 August next year.

Adopting [resolution 2433 \(2018\)](#), on Thursday, the 15-member Security Council also called on the Lebanese Government to develop a plan to increase its naval capabilities, with the goal of decreasing the Mission's Maritime Taskforce and transitioning activities to the country's armed forces.

The Security Council also stressed the need for UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to improve its management of civilian resources by fostering cooperation with the [Special Coordinator for the country](#).

It also urged all parties to ensure that the Mission's freedom of movement and access to the so-called 'Blue Line' – separating Israel and Lebanon – in all its parts, is fully respected and unimpeded.

Originally established in 1978, UNIFIL was greatly reinforced after the 2006 fighting to oversee the cessation of hostilities between Israel and the Lebanese group Hizbollah. It is tasked with ensuring that the area between the 'Blue Line' and the Litani River is free of unauthorized weapons, personnel and assets. It also cooperates with the Lebanese Armed Forces so they can fulfil their security responsibilities.

[Guinea-Bissau: Upcoming elections vital to prevent 'relapse' into instability, says UN envoy](#)

Highlighting the importance of the upcoming legislative elections in Guinea-Bissau, the top United Nations official in the country reiterated the importance of "far-reaching" reforms to prevent a relapse into political and institutional instability.

José Viegas Filho, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Guinea-Bissau and the head of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the

country ([UNIOGBIS](#)) [called for](#) sustained international support for the West African nation.

“I therefore urge all international partners to maintain and increase their political, technical and financial support to help national institutions during and beyond the legislative and presidential elections,” said Mr. Filho, briefing the Security Council for the first time since his [appointment](#) as the Special Representative.

Mr. Filho also informed the Council of some difficulties in the preparations for the legislative elections (scheduled for 18 November), including disagreements voiced by some political actors against the 30-day timeframe set by the Government for voter registration and delays in arrival of biometric kits.

On the other hand, the senior UN official also highlighted important developments, including the adoption of a new gender parity quota law, on 2 August, which establishes a minimum of 36 per cent representation for women in the lists of candidates for legislative and local government elections, as well as for appointments to key decision-making positions.

This, he explained, is a “significant development” for gender equality and women’s empowerment in Guinea-Bissau.

Though the law will have to be reviewed by specialized committees of the national Parliament, as well as formally promulgated by the President of Guinea-Bissau, it should enter into force before the November legislative elections, [according](#) to UNIOGBIS.

Furthermore, Mr. Filho said that he continues to support the “full implementation” of the 2016 Conakry agreement, which set out a framework for a peaceful resolution to the [political crisis](#) plaguing the country since its independence in 1974.

Turning to the work of UNIOGBIS, Mr. Filho informed the 15-member Security Council of the Integrated Peacebuilding Office’s support to national authorities in the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime.

‘Renewed sense of optimism’

There is a renewed sense of optimism regarding the definitive solution to the protracted crisis – *Mauro Vieira*

Also at the briefing, Mauro Vieira, the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the UN and the Chair of the Guinea-Bissau Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, spoke of his trip to the country in July this year, during which he met wide range of interlocutors.

“My mission confirmed that there has been tangible progress in the implementation of the Conakry agreement and in the process of return to normality of the political life as compared to same period last year,” he

said, adding: "There is a renewed sense of optimism regarding the definitive solution to the protracted crisis and the upcoming elections are seen as a window of opportunity to this end."

He also outlined recent developments, including the appointment of a consensual Prime Minister and the formation of an inclusive government as major achievements towards the implementation of the Conakry agreement.

[Impressive African health gains at risk from changing trends: WHO report](#)

Life expectancy across Africa has improved significantly, says a new United Nations World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) report released on Thursday, but national health systems must be improved to ensure that services get to the people who need them most.

The study, launched during the 68th session of the WHO Regional Committee in Dakar, provides a snapshot of the state of health in the African region.

Emerging data shows a continued improvement, with the continent seeing the biggest jump in healthy life expectancy – time spent in full health – anywhere in the world: from 50.9 years in 2012, to 53.8 years in 2015.

Deaths resulting from the ten biggest health risks in Africa – such as lower respiratory infections, HIV and diarrhoeal diseases – dropped by half between 2000 and 2015, partly as a result of specialized health programmes.

Speaking at the launch of the report, Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO's Regional Director for Africa in Dakar, expressed his pride that Africans are now living longer and healthier lives: "Nearly three years of extra health is a gift that makes us all proud. Of course, we hope that these gains will continue, and the region will reach global standards."

At the same time, the report warns that this achievement can only be sustained and expanded if health services are significantly improved, and states that the performance of health systems in the region – measured by access to services, quality of care, community demand for services and resilience to outbreaks – is low.

Chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer need to be tackled, with a person aged 30 to 70 in the region having a one in five chance of dying from a noncommunicable disease. And two critical age groups – adolescents and the elderly – are being under-served, with surveys indicating a complete lack of elder care in a third of African countries.

“Health services must keep up with the evolving health trends in the region,” said Dr Moeti. “In the past we focused on specific diseases as these were causing a disproportionately high number of deaths. We have been highly successful at stopping these threats, and people’s health is now being challenged by a broad range of conditions. We need to develop a new and more holistic approach to health.”

This approach involves increasing spending on health, but also targeting funds in more effective ways. The report suggests that health systems that perform well invest up to 40 per cent of their budgets on their workforce, and a third on infrastructure.

Whilst it is not a scorecard, the report makes specific recommendations for each of the 47 countries of the region, and identifies areas where nations are demonstrating good practice. Examples include Algeria, with its good coverage of available health service; Kenya, which has a good range of available essential services; and Mauritius, where there is good access to services.

By improving performance, the countries named in the study have a better chance of meeting their commitment to achieve health-related targets set by the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).