

## Dire lack of winter funding puts millions of refugees in Middle East at risk, warns UN agency

3 October 2017 – Dwindling resources could severely jeopardize efforts to provide refugees and displaced persons across the Middle East with essential winter supplies such as thermal blankets and warm clothing, the United Nations refugee agency has warned.

For many it will be the seventh consecutive winter in displacement, living in tents or in makeshift settlements in near-freezing temperatures.

“We estimate that as many as four million are at extreme risk and need timely and [substantial help to properly prepare for the forthcoming winter](#) [and] of these only one in four are likely to get the assistance they need,” said Andrej Mahecic, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), calling for greater funding for the agency’s response plan to ensure help is provided to all in desperate need.

According to estimates, there are nearly 15 million Syrian and Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons across the region, in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Iraq.

With their needs rising significantly during winter due to the harsh conditions, ensuring sufficient funding for UN agency’s Regional Winter Assistance Plan for 2017/2018 (amounting to \$245 million but only 26 per cent funded) is critical, the spokesperson noted.

“Without proper help, many refugee families end up being pushed further into debt and come under increased pressure to resort to desperate steps to try to make ends meet. Women and children are especially affected,” Mr. Mahecic added.

Throughout this autumn (September-November), UNHCR plans to provide cash assistance, distribute winter items and invest in preparation, insulation and repairs of shelters, as well as improve drainage in the camps.

With sufficient funding, the Regional Plan will ensure basic winter necessities – including blankets, clothing, tarpaulin and fuel – are provided to refugees and displaced persons. It will also assist those living below the poverty line with a special assistance programme.

More than 50 per cent of the assistance package is scheduled to be delivered in cash which would allow refugees and the internally displaced to address their priorities and meet urgent needs.