Extraordinary Meeting for the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugee Affairs (ARCP)

In preparation for the consultations of “the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)” and “the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)”

General Secretariat of the League of Arab States
Cairo, 25-26 July 2017
(Concept Note)

First: Background on Migrants and Refugees:

The Arab Region is witnessing a significant increase in migration and displacement, which is dynamic and complex, and provides both opportunities and significant challenges for policy makers in the region and beyond. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Arab region hosted more than 35 million international migrants in 2016, including both large numbers of labour migrants, and refugees. Additionally, significant numbers of migrants transit through the region, or stay for short periods. The GCC is one of the largest hubs of expatriate labour in the world, hosting more than 25 million foreign nationals in 2015, mainly from Asia, as well as the Arab region and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2015, expatriate labour in the GCC sent home an estimated 105 billion dollars (US) in remittances, more than one fifth of all remittances sent globally. Other countries in the region are also destinations for labour migrants, including Jordan, Lebanon and Libya. Additionally, it should be noted that the Arab region has also witnessed large influxes of refugees and migrants of Sub-Saharan African countries, whether for settling or transit. In 2016, over 181,000 migrants and refugees – mainly West and East Africans – arrived in Italy from North African shores, the vast majority using Libya as a gateway to the Mediterranean.

Migration is also a livelihood strategy for populations in the Arab region, and historical links have also led to the formation of significant diaspora populations both within the Arab region, as well as in Europe – with more than 26 million Arab migrants and refugees living outside their countries of birth in 2015.

The context in the Arab region calls on actors and policy makers at the local, national, regional and global levels to adopt policies and strategies that respond to the realities of the current migration dynamics – maximizing the possibilities of migration for development while ensuring the protection of migrants and their families. The development of a Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration presents an historical
opportunity for achieving a world in which migrants move as a matter of choice rather than necessity, through safe, orderly and regular channels, and in which migration is well governed and able to act as a positive force for individuals, societies and States.

Refugees do not choose to migrate, they are forced to flee. Conflict and persecution drive individuals and family groups across international borders. More than half of the world refugee population are women, children and elderly persons. Displacement is a worldwide phenomenon. The number of persons who are forcibly displaced is at a historically high level, with 65.6 million forcibly displaced people globally.

There are substantial refugee populations in the Arab region; some 5.4 million Syrians have fled the conflict there, and comprise the world’s largest refugee population. The region is home to 5% of the total world population and exports 50% of global refugees. In addition, some of the world’s major refugee hosting countries are in the region, with Lebanon hosting the largest number of refugees relative to its national population, where 1 in 6 people is a refugee, and in Jordan 1 in 11. These staggering figures continue to attest to the generosity and resilience of States in the region and their hosting communities.

The Arab region is one of origin, transit, and destination, and displacement scenarios range from fresh emergencies to protracted situations. Displaced persons and their hosting communities continue to suffer from the consequences of conflict; the lack of access to basic services; exploitation and violence; risks posed by mixed migratory movements; and limited access to solutions in and beyond the region, among others. The growing humanitarian needs are an indication that those displaced and the countries who host them continue to require support to face the many challenges posed by conflict, violence and displacement.

By their sheer magnitude and complexity, refugee crises in the region have challenged UN agencies and governments alike, forcing the international community to find ways to respond to the growing needs of refugees and their hosting communities in more inclusive, comprehensive, innovative and coordinated ways. The Arab region offers a wealth of experience that is of relevance in the development of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).


In light of the increasing intensity of the refugee crisis in the Arab region during the last decade, and due to the continuation of the Syrian crisis and its political, security and social implications, the Arab neighboring countries and other Arab countries hosting Syrian refugees have been deeply affected.

The Council of the League of Arab States at its Summit Level, at its 28th Ordinary Session has released a number of important resolutions, among which assigning the League Council at the Ministerial Level to explore establishing a specific mechanism to
assist the neighboring Arab states of Syria and other Arab countries hosting Syrian refugees and forcibly displaced persons to help them support the related burdens.

The resolutions stressed the importance of providing full and necessary support to the Arab countries hosting refugees, so as to enable the provision of humanitarian and relief services and establish development projects in these countries to reduce the negative economic and social effects of asylum, and the need for concerted efforts to create conditions that guarantee the return of the Syrian refugees to their homeland through their rehabilitation in a way that would contribute in rebuilding their country and overcome the difficulties and obstacles created by the years of war.

The League Council urged the international community, particularly donor states and institutions, to shoulder their responsibilities and provide more support to the countries hosting refugees.

The Summit resolutions also affirmed that the Palestinian refugees are at the core of the Palestinian issue, and uphold the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their home, rejecting the attempts of settlement in all its forms. The resolutions also called for providing the elements of resilience and decent life for the Palestinian refugees in camps and lifting the harm and unfair discrimination against them by Israel, the occupying power. The Summit resolutions requested the Arab countries to provide the necessary financial and technical support to the Somali government to meet the increasing humanitarian needs of the Yemeni refugees arriving in Somalia, as well as the return of Somalis from Kenya and Yemen and to contribute in the reconstruction of Iraqi cities that were liberated from ISIL, as well as provide relief for displaced persons.

Third: Background on the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugee Affairs (ARCP):

The Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugee Affairs (ARCP) was established in accordance with the resolution of the League Council, at the ministerial level, No. 7833 dated 07/09/2014 in its regular session (142). This resolution was taken in the context of recognition of the importance of establishing a mechanism to discuss various migration issues, particularly in light of the current circumstances in the Arab region, which was witnessing large flows of refugees and displaced persons.

The General Secretariat of the League of Arab States (Refugees, Expatriates & Migration Affairs Department) as a technical secretariat of the Arab Regional Consultative Process, holds an annual meeting during the second quarter of the year, on the level of senior officials concerned with migration and expatriate communities living abroad as well as officials in charge of migration and refugee issues in the concerned Arab countries.

The ARCP aims at creating an Arab space to discuss international migration and refugee issues, through: (1) strengthening cooperation between the participating countries, (2) working towards a more profound understanding of migration and refugee issues in the region, (3) promoting a common understanding of the causes,
dimensions, patterns and the effects of migration and its future trends in the Arab region, and (4) helping governments to participate in global migration-related events with unified visions, the current priority of which are the ongoing consultations to develop the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR).

The ARCP scope of work includes the following topics: migration and development; migration management; migration policies; asylum, displacement and forced migration; labour migration; brain drain; mixed migration; the rights of migrants; remittances; capacity building; and the provision of migration data.

The ARCP has held three ordinary meetings so far, the first took place in April 2015, the second in May 2016 and the third in May 2017. It held also one extraordinary meeting in August 2016 in collaboration with the IOM and UNHCR in preparation for the High-Level General Assembly Plenary Meeting on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants held on 19 September 2016. Representatives from 18 Member States participated in the Extraordinary Meeting in addition to Arab Organizations, UN Specialized Agencies and the Arab Parliament. The Extraordinary Meeting issued a Statement comprising the Arab position on the themes of the High Level Meeting.

Fourth: New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants:

The New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants (NYD) adopted in the High-level Meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants confirmed States’ solidarity with persons who are forced to flee; reaffirmed obligations to fully respect the human rights of refugees and migrants; and pledged support to countries affected by large movements of refugees and migrants. It contained a set of commitments that apply to both refugees and migrants, as well as commitments specifically for refugees and others specifically for migrants. Annex I of the New York Declaration contains a Comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) which outlines steps towards a global Compact on refugees in 2018. Annex II outlines steps towards developing a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, leading to its consideration for adoption in 2018. NYD mentioned the importance to ensure that the progress made by Member States and the United Nations in implementing the commitments made at the high-level meeting will be the subject of periodic assessments provided to the General Assembly with reference, as appropriate, to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As mentioned in the NYD, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is expected to set out a range of principles, commitments and understandings among Member States regarding international migration in all its dimensions. It is further expected to make an important contribution to global governance and enhance coordination on international migration. It also is intended to present a framework for comprehensive international cooperation on migrants and human mobility and address all aspects of international migration, including the humanitarian, developmental, human rights-related and other aspects of migration. It is to be guided by the 2030
Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, and informed by the Declaration of the 2013 High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. The GCM is a state-led process being pursued through three phases, the first of which is a consultative phase to which the outcomes of this meeting will contribute.

In regards to refugee affairs, the NYD sets out the elements of the **Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)**, and requests UNHCR to engage with States and relevant stakeholders in its development and implementation. Based on the practical application of the CRRF in a number of pilot countries, UNHCR will propose a **Global Compact on Refugees** in the High Commissioner’s 2018 annual report to the General Assembly.

In implementation of the ARCP Extraordinary Meeting statement, the general secretariat of the League of Arab States (Refugees, Expatriates and Migration Affairs Department) will follow up on the implementation of New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants at the Arab regional Level on periodic basis, through the Arab Regional Consultative Process (ARCP). It will also follow-up on the actions taken and ongoing consultations to develop the Global Compact on Refugees and Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular migration, and submit the conclusions of the follow-up to relevant forums identified for this purpose.

**Fifth: ARCP Extraordinary Meeting to Follow up on the consultations of “the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)” and “the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)”:**

Within the framework of implementing the ARCP extraordinary meeting Statement, and keen on urging the Member States to actively contribute in the ongoing consultations for the development of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, at the third meeting of the Arab Consultative Process held at the General Secretariat headquarters on 8 and 9 May 2017, it was agreed on the following:

- **Date and Venue:**
  Holding an extraordinary meeting for the ARCP at the General Secretariat Headquarters on 25 and 26 July 2017.

- **Participants:**
  The focal points of the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugee Affairs, in addition to concerned authorities particularly the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Each Member State will determine the head of its delegation before the meeting.

- **Partners:**
  The relevant international and regional organizations of the United Nations to be involved in the two consultative processes that will lead to the adoption of the two global compacts represented by the International Organization for migration
(IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to ensure access to the most recent information regarding the ongoing processes, and ensure outcome documents of the meeting are submitted to the relevant processes for their consideration.

Sixth: Purpose of the Meeting:
The Extraordinary Meeting of the Arab Regional Consultation Process aims to raise awareness among Member States on the ongoing processes for the development of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration to identify key messages, priorities and experiences that the Arab region is keen to include in the GCM to be presented in all the forums that will be held for this purpose. The first of these – the GCM Arab Regional Consultation – will be organized by ESCWA in cooperation with IOM in Beirut in September 2017.

It will also be an opportunity to brief Member States on key migration dynamics, challenges and opportunities and identify priority areas for the Arab region to be considered within the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) focusing on drivers of migration, smuggling and trafficking, labour mobility and development, and international cooperation and good governance.

Regarding the Global Compact on Refugees, the meeting aims at updating the Member States on the latest displacement trends and protection challenges in the region, brief participants on CRRF developments worldwide including on its four key pillars (ease pressures on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand third-country solutions, and support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity) on the process in leading up to the Global Compact on Refugees, and reaffirm the need for continuous responsibility sharing with refugee hosting countries in the region to address the impact of conflict and displacement.

In addition, the meeting will facilitate a discussion on the application of the CRRF principles in the region and cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination to respond the challenges posed by displacement.

Seventh: Format of the Meeting:
The meeting is divided into two days; the first day will be devoted to the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and the second day for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). UNHCR will dedicate its presentations to raising awareness of the ongoing process of developing the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) with focus on the specificity of the Arab region to support the Member States in developing common priorities for inclusion in the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR). IOM will make presentations on the priority topics which the Arab region may wish to propose for consideration in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM).
Eighth: Expected Outcomes:
The Extraordinary Meeting will issue two separate documents, the first on the Arab Regional Consultative Process contribution to the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and second on its contribution to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The two documents will comprise the key messages, priorities and experiences that the Member States wish to include in the two compacts. LAS General Secretariat will circulate the outcome documents to: the Permanent Missions of the Arab Member States to the League of Arab States to circulate it among their concerned bodies, the Leagues’ missions abroad, particularly its missions in New York and Geneva, being the focal points with the United Nations. LAS missions, in turn, would circulate the outcome documents to the Arab States’ Permanent Missions to the UN to ensure its consideration in the global compacts. UNHCR and IOM will support this process. LAS will also present these documents in all relevant regional and international events and will submit the documents through the officially established channels for communication of inputs to the global compacts.