

PRESS RELEASE

UNICEF hosts EU Parliamentarians in Jordan ahead of 3rd Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria

On eve following two-day visit to Za'atari refugee camp and the host community, MEPs highlight ongoing challenges facing Syrian and Jordanian children

AMMAN, 05 March 2019 – In the lead up to the Third Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria, to take place from 12-14 March 2019, Members of the European Parliament (MEP) travelled to Jordan to see how UNICEF, working closely with donors including the EU and the Government, is supporting programmes to empower vulnerable children and youth, including Syrian refugees.

Eight years since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, the refugee crisis continues to place significant pressure on national systems of host countries like Jordan, which, despite the generous support of the international community, are creating significant challenges on the ability of these countries to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children.

The European Parliament (EP) Coordinator on Child Rights, Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, and the Chair of the Child Rights Intergroup at EP, Caterina Chinnici, joined UNICEF Representative Robert Jenkins to visit children and their families in Za'atari refugee camp, home to 80,000 refugees. UNICEF is supporting education, health and nutrition, water and sanitation and child protection services for 45,000 children. The EU parliamentarians also spent time in a Makani Centre in the host community, where UNICEF runs EU-funded programmes for children, providing them with learning, protection, life skills, and youth services.

"We are extremely grateful for our long-standing partnership with the EU that is providing education and protection support to vulnerable children and youth," said **Robert Jenkins, Representative, UNICEF Jordan**. "Through continued support and investment, we have a unique opportunity harness the potential of Jordan's significant youth population so that they can reach their potential and contribute to society."

Amidst the ongoing crisis, the EU has been a key donor to UNICEF in Jordan and the region, allowing for countries hosting Syrian refugees to strengthen their public services and benefit both their communities and refugee families alike. However, robust social safety nets are still needed to address the poverty and vulnerability of children and protect them from serious violations. Since the beginning of the crisis, some 80 per cent of Syrian refugees, most of them children, have been crossing the borders to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey looking for safety.

"The EU partnership with UNICEF makes a real difference on the ground for hundreds of thousands Syrian refugees and other vulnerable children in Jordan. Ahead of the Syrian conference, we should not forget the plight of the Syrian refugees and the challenges of the host countries. Together, we need to go beyond the humanitarian response towards a long-term sustainable development in the Region," said **MEP Anna Maria Corazza Bildt**.

Even though Syrian children living in Jordan are spared the armed conflict, they are continuously exposed to a myriad of challenges. Many families are struggling to survive, living below the poverty line, putting children at greater risk of dropping out of school or resorting to negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage and child labour.

In this context, continued investment in child protection and education are critical, allowing them to safely build the skills needed for a successful future.

“Jordan has done a tremendous job in helping accommodate a vast number of refugees, including 340 thousand refugee children. Many are the projects that have been developed by UNICEF and other key NGOs to help provide basic services to these children, also thanks to the EU funding. Much more needs to be done, though, to help these children and their families, who are fleeing from violence and the atrocities of the war. It’s a responsibility of the European Union and the international community as a whole,” said **MEP Caterina Chinnici**.

Note to Editors:

Songs project

On 11 March, the UNICEF Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (MENARO) will launch, in Beirut, the music album “11,” featuring children’s songs from the Region. The project was supported by the European Union and carried out in partnership with the renowned Lebanese composer Jad Rahbani, who re-arranged to be recorded in a professional studio by children in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The album’s development is part of UNICEF’s psychosocial support programme to help children impacted by the Syria crisis and uses music to promote social cohesion. It gives children an opportunity to revive their connection with their heritage and the Arabic-language. The songs are all-time regional favourites written and composed by the world-famous Elias Rahbani in 1976, during the war in Lebanon. They were originally recorded by his two sons: Jad and Ghassan, when they were children. The 11 songs are about education, the environment, family ties, nutrition, peace and reconstruction.

About UNICEF Brussels Office

The UNICEF Office for relations with European Union (EU) institutions in Brussels works together with the EU and its main institutions, such as the European Commission and the European Parliament, in all areas relevant to UNICEF’s work to promote children’s rights.

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