ITU Regional Development Forum for Arab Region (RDF-ARB)
Accelerating the digital development in Arab Region

Organized by the International Telecommunication Union with the support of the

Bahraini Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications

6-7 November 2023 -Kingdom of Bahrain

CONTRIBUTION FORM

Please note that submitted information will be presented during the RDF-ARB P2C Roundtables and

it will also be reflected on the pledging platform of the Partner 2 Connect Digital Coalition.

Once completed send to ITU-RO-ArabStates@itu.int

ORGANIZATION: the National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA)

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TITLE: Promoting Digital Inclusion for refugees in Egypt

DESCRIPTION OF ACTION:

The MENA Region hosts an estimated 16 million forcibly displaced people by the end of 2022, and access to SIM cards and digital connectivity is problematic for refugees in the region. Egypt is a transit and destination country for refugees and asylum-seekers arriving from across the Middle East and East Africa (UNHCR, Displaced and Disconnected MENA report, 2023).   As of June 2023, Egypt has opened its doors to accommodate a population of 299,167 refugees and asylum seekers. A significant portion of this community resides in the Greater Cairo and North Coast regions (UNHCR Fact Sheet June 2023). Just like any other population, access to digital connectivity holds paramount importance for refugees in Egypt, including the availability of SIM cards.

UNHCR bears the responsibility of enrolling refugees and asylum-seekers on behalf of the Egyptian Government and providing them with official identity documents. This registration process involves the utilization of biometric data such as iris scans and fingerprints. Registered refugees are issued a "blue card" that remains valid for three years, while asylum-seekers are given a "yellow card" that holds validity for 18 months. However, these Identity (ID) credentials alone do not grant access to digital and financial services within the country. To avail such services, refugees and asylum-seekers must also possess valid and unexpired residency documents, which are issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (UNHCR, Displaced and Disconnected MENA report, 2023). SIM registration in Egypt is regulated by the National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA), which sets different requirements for SIM registration/activation for Egyptians and foreigners, including refugees and asylum seekers. For foreigners, an original passport with a valid residency permit must be presented to a mobile network operator (MNO) branch.

Challenge: Maintaining continuously valid government-issued identity documents presents a challenge. Although the Egyptian Government typically extends residency to refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR, this residency is limited to a duration of six months before requiring renewal. The process of renewing residency can be complex for refugees who reside away from Cairo where renewal takes place.   Obtaining SIM cards in Egypt requires an official identification document, typically in the form of a passport. UNHCR cards have not yet been officially recognized as valid identification. Consequently, refugees face hurdles in acquiring SIM cards, hindering their ability to have a consistent means of communication. This also poses difficulties for the UNHCR in efficiently reaching out to refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt, where important communications such as feedback, status updates, and appointment scheduling are essential.

Response: In a proactive endeavor to ensure equitable internet access and SIM card availability for refugees, the National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA) collaborated with UNHCR – Egypt. The aim was to reform the existing policy to enable refugees to purchase SIM cards. UNHCR shared copies of various UN cards issued to refugees with NTRA. On 17 October 2023, NTRA issued a regulatory framework that will facilitate the process of purchasing SIM cards for refugees and asylum seekers.   Consequently, this framework will empower NTRA to gauge the number of refugees who have procured SIM cards, thereby quantifying the extent of access achieved.

COUNTRIES in FOCUS: Egypt

YEARS of IMPLEMENTATION:

- ☐ 2023
- ☐ 2024
- ☐ 2025

RELEVANT ITU REGIONAL INITIATIVE:

☐ ARB1: Sustainable digital economy through digital transformation.

☐ ARB2: Enhancing confidence, security and privacy in the use of telecommunications/Information and communication technologies in the era of new and emerging digital technologies.

☐ ARB3: Developing digital infrastructure for smart sustainable cities and communities.

☐ ARB4: Building capacities and encouraging digital innovation, entrepreneurship and future foresight.

☑ ARB5: Developing means of digital regulation.

RELATED ITU-D PRIORITIES AS DEFINED BY THE ITU WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE 2022

☑ Affordable connectivity

☐ Digital Transformation

☑ Enabling policy and regulatory environment

☐ Resource mobilization and international cooperation

☑ Inclusive and secure telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development

RELATED ITU PRIORITIES AS DEFINED BY ITU PLENIPOTENTIARY CONFERENCE 2022

☐ Spectrum use for space and terrestrial services.

☐ International telecommunication numbering resources.

☑ Inclusive and secure telecommunication /ICT infrastructure and services.

☐ Digital applications.

☑ Enabling environment.