
A humanitarian tragedy for Syrian refugees

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Title: *A humanitarian tragedy for Syrian refugees*

First Published: January 2014

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Over the last year, the number of Syrian refugees has doubled five times over. Two weeks ago, the UN launched its largest appeal for a single humanitarian emergency ever, faced by the urgency of at least 2.3 million Syrian refugees in need of humanitarian assistance, in addition to the millions of internally displaced Syrians. The UN cited the vast numbers of displacement and called for the international community to take responsibility for the crisis, appealing for \$6.5 billion in funds.

To keep pace with 2013's alarming exodus, more than 196,000 tents and 809,000 plastic tarpaulins were distributed to refugees residing in camps and informal sites. As Syria approaches the end of its third year of conflict, dozens of refugee settlements are now clearly visible, even from outer space.

At the end of 2012, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had counted 525,000 refugees, and today the number of externally displaced Syrians is at least 2.3 million – which only refers to individuals recognized as refugees, i.e. not counting the 53,000 people who are still awaiting registration in the overcrowded registration centres. UNHCR calls the crisis the largest refugee exodus in recent history. And with no end to the Syrian conflict in sight, the agency estimates the number of refugees will reach 4.1 million by the end of this year.

Schools, child-friendly spaces and psycho-social support facilities were established in camps to help meet the needs of the refugees who continue to pour out of Syria at a rate of 127,000 people a month. Aid agencies have increased their support to communities that host 80 per cent of the Syrian refugees, which places an enormous burden on local health facilities, schools, water and sanitation.

Syrian Refugees
2012 - 0.5 million
2013 - 2.3 million

Children

Currently there are 5.5 million children affected by the situation. They are deprived of education, protection, necessary immunizations, and a chance to play and have a childhood. Being Syria's future, displaced children and their vulnerability are indeed an important aspect of the crisis

To address the susceptibility of having a “lost generation” of Syrians, the executive director of the UN Children's Fund, Anthony Lake, signed a vital contribution agreement last Wednesday with the EU for €18 million to deliver critically needed aid to children directly affected by the Syrian disaster.

Lake also held meetings with two coordinators of inter-agency responses: Kristalina Georgieva, who is the European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, and Andris Piebalgs, the European Commissioner for Development.

Hosting Countries

The size and scale of the Syria crisis over the past year required the intensive engagement of 147 relief agencies, the main host countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt and the generosity of scores of donors. However, the UN's 2013 refugee response plan was only 68 percent funded.

Across the region at present, some 400,000 refugees currently live in formal camps, but nearly two million reside outside formal settlements, testifying to the hospitality offered by host countries.

See MEMO report: [Influx of Syrian refugees highlights ongoing Palestinian struggles in Lebanon](#).

Families lacking financial resources often send their children to work to ensure survival. In both Jordan and Lebanon, UNHCR found children as young as seven-years-old working long hours for little pay, sometimes in dangerous or exploitative conditions. In some settlements, up to 43 per cent of the refugee households are headed by women.

*Across the region,
2 million refugees
live outside the
formal camps*

Women and children constitute 80 per cent of the refugee population, and are highly vulnerable to exploitation as they flee together through checkpoints, potentially being sexually abused at not only the checkpoints and urban refugee gatherings, but also upon arrival in the camps or in unofficial settlements, as well as financially exploited by lodgers and employers.

In order to address these humanitarian atrocities and ensure adequate protection and documentation, refugee registration efforts were expanded over the course of 2013, reducing waiting times to only a matter of hours. Mobile registration teams were also established to better reach unregistered Syrian exiles.

An estimated 4.1 million Syrian refugees will need assistance by the end of 2014, including two million children. Agencies are calling for strong donor support ahead of the 15 January Kuwait II pledging conference for Syria; agencies are appealing for \$2.3 billion for activities within Syria and \$4.2 billion to address the needs of refugees.

Shelter

Seeing that Syria's refugee migration has grown, the number of formal camps across the region has doubled, from 19 camps a year ago to 37 at present. Turkey currently has 21 camps, Iraq has 12 camps and transit sites and Jordan currently has three camps with a fourth site ready to host up to 100,000 new arrivals.

Lebanon, with limited absorption capacity, hosts the largest number of Syrians in the region with over 850,000 refugees registered or awaiting registration, mostly exiles who live in non-camp settings spread across thousands of locations. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA) works to meet the needs of persons under its mandate caught up in the conflict. As their mandate only covers the 12 camps, thousands of Palestinian refugees from Syria are trapped with no aid from UNHCR, who cannot cover Palestinians, as they are under UNRWA responsibility and yet pushed out of the over-crowded official camps in Lebanon. As the number of refugees in Lebanon

is reaching 25 per cent of Lebanon's total population, the eternal anxiety for refugees to over-stay their welcome (Palestinian, Iraqi and Syrian) and/or disrupt Lebanon's delicate sectarian makeup, is clearly hampering the crisis relief response. Establishing official camps, adequate shelter, and even winterizing relief efforts, such as the IKEA and Danish Refugee Councils solar energized and insulated Box Shelters, have all been halted and in some cases, even retracted.

UNHCR earmarked \$138 million to provide additional weatherproofing, launch initiatives to insulate tents from the ground, winterize water and sanitation facilities, improve drainage works and distribute additional thermal blankets, mattresses, stoves, clothing and fuel, heating education facilities and cash grant schemes. More than 78,000 families received stoves while tens of thousands of other families benefited from cash assistance to purchase heaters on the local market. Electrification efforts were extended in most camps and fuel was distributed.

Gulf State donors contributed more than 17,000 caravans to Jordan's Za'atri camp, making sure all of Za'atri's 80,000 residents are in hard shelter by early 2014. Cash assistance programs targeting Jordan's urban refugees reached some 110,000 people using advance biometric technology.

Turkey similarly provided almost 12,000 caravans to refugees in Jordan's camps. Winter aid initiatives were likewise implemented in Turkey and Iraq, which respectively host 557,000 and 210,000 refugees, as well as in Egypt, where 131,000 Syrians are registered with UNHCR.

UNHCR currently has a 31 per cent gap in its funding to cover the humanitarian crisis in Syria, an amount totalling \$933,608,324, reflective of the international community's non-recognition of hundreds if thousands of Syrian refugees in need.

The number of refugees in Lebanon is nearing 25% of it's total population

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