

UN INTER-AGENCY RESPONSE

MONTHLY OVERVIEW

UNHCR AUGUST 2012

Highlights of the week:

- *The deteriorating security situation in Lebanon hampered UNHCR and partners' efforts to assist the displaced community. Registration and distribution activities were particularly affected, but have now returned to normal.*
- *Twenty displaced families were evicted from an operational school in west Bekaa. UNHCR, MoSA and partner organizations intervened and the families returned.*
- *A reply is still expected from the Government to UNHCR's request for undertaking the rehabilitation of various abandoned public buildings, to create additional shelter space. Some 180 Syrian displaced families are occupying six operational schools that must be vacated before the school year begins.*
- *Security and protection concerns dramatically increased this month in the wake of recent kidnappings of Syrian nationals. Punctual shelling from Syria affected villages in the northern border areas, where many displaced Syrians are hosted.*
- *The WFP food voucher system commenced in Akkar and Wadi Khaled following the success of the program in the Bekaa. Assessments are underway to also establish the program in Tripoli.*
- *Centralized registration commenced in Tripoli with the cooperation of MoSA.*
- *UNHCR and partners along with the MoEHE met with over 250 school directors in August to advertise the MoEHE's decision to permit displaced Syrian children to enroll in Lebanese public schools. UNHCR, UNICEF and SCI will cover the costs of registration in addition to providing school supplies to children.*
- *Information campaigns targeted displaced Syrians in the Bekaa and North, informing them of the benefits and protection provided in registering with UNHCR.*

Numbers and trends

Two worrying trends noted this month. First, for the first time since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, displaced Syrians are occupying operational schools. This reflects how stretched the shelter situation is becoming in Lebanon.

Second, displaced Syrians from minority

confessions are increasingly being identified in Lebanon. They represent now 5% of all registered Syrian displaced. Most of them report that they were not victims of indiscriminate bombing, but that their neighborhood was intentionally targeted/shelled by the Free Syrian Army.

Over 57,000 displaced Syrians are



receiving protection and assistance in Lebanon through the efforts of the Government of Lebanon and UN and NGO partners. Of this number, 42,947 are registered, with an additional 14,952 people having been in contact with UNHCR to be registered. This represents an increase of some 11,350 registered Syrians since the end of July, largely due to the starting of registration activities in Tripoli.

UNHCR is expanding its programme and protection activities to southern Lebanon, as the number of displaced Syrians seeking refuge in this region increases.

UNHCR, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), began centralized registration in Tripoli at the Rachid Karame International Exhibition Centre on 14 August. Displaced Syrians are travelling from different areas in the North to register with UNHCR. The majority of them have fled Homs, Aleppo and Damascus. A total of 3,897 people (780 families) have been registered in Tripoli since the center opened.

Newly arrived Syrians in the Bekaa are mainly from Damascus, Homs, Aleppo and Dara'a.

UNHCR and partners continue to reach out to the displaced community through information campaigns that encourage newly arrived families in need of protection or assistance to come forward and register.

Protection and Security

The security situation in August posed significant protection concerns and challenges for both the North and Bekaa. Between deadly clashes in Tripoli, continued shelling in Akkar and reports of kidnappings throughout Lebanon,

particularly in the Bekaa, UNHCR and partner protection teams exerted extra efforts to guarantee the safety of displaced Syrians this month.

Several assistance activities were delayed, modified and/or suspended in order to adjust to security constraints. The month ended with the resumption of registration, distribution and other activities. However, the security situation will be monitored closely in order to maintain the safety of staff and beneficiaries.

Of concern to UNHCR and partners was a trend noted this month that many families reportedly are not intending to send their children to school due to economic reasons. UNHCR and education partners will as last year cover the fees of children enrolling in public schools, as well provide children with the necessary school items. Providing education to children is a key protection tool because it enables UNHCR and partners to monitor and identify vulnerable youth. It also prevents children from being forced to work and engages idle children who may otherwise spend their time focusing on the recent negative events they have encountered.

This month, 25 wounded Syrians were admitted to hospitals.

North Lebanon

Protection

UNHCR and partner organizations continued to address the protection needs of displaced Syrians in the North throughout August.

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) regularly conducts house-to-house visits with vulnerable people, providing psycho-social support and counseling to

women at risk, people with disabilities and separated children. Efforts to enhance the protection monitoring mechanism used during distribution activities were undertaken in August, and a questionnaire will be used by DRC outreach workers to better identify people with specific needs.

Security, however, remains a pressing protection concern for UNHCR, as is the limited availability of shelter for new arrivals. As more Syrians flee into north Lebanon, border villages are becoming increasingly saturated. Furthermore, a number of these villages, including Al Nurah, Bekayaa and Dabbabiyyeh, have not only reached their maximum hosting capacity but are also subjected to regular shelling from Syria. The safety of displaced Syrians living in these villages is a major protection concern for UNHCR. DRC outreach workers report that a number of the displaced and local populations flee these villages at night in order to avoid the shelling. Most families are, however, unwilling to relocate, preferring to stay in the area because they have close relatives living nearby.

The General Security Office (GSO) announced this month that Syrian nationals are now allowed to renew their return coupons (visas) in Lebanon instead of having to return to Syria and re-enter. A fee of 300,000 LL is required per individual renewal, which represents a genuine constraint, as many displaced Syrians do not have the financial means to cover such a renewal fee. They may choose instead to not renew or return to Syria.

Registration/Numbers

Registration in north Lebanon reached 4,483 individuals (862 cases) in August. This brings the total number of

registered Syrians in the North to 23,151.

Mid-August witnessed the inauguration of the first centralized registration center in Tripoli, where a few thousand displaced families were awaiting registration. The establishment of this centre addressed one of the most pressing challenges in previous months, as identifying the location was difficult given the tumultuous nature of Tripoli.

With the collaboration of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), UNHCR began registering displaced families at the Rachid Karame International Exhibition Centre. The centre will serve as the main centralized registration site for all displaced Syrian communities in north Lebanon. Currently there are 4,423 people awaiting registration.

Approximately 75% of the displaced population that approached UNHCR to register in Tripoli arrived from Homs (namely Idlib and Tal Kalakh). This represents a trend from the outset of Syrian displacement.

During registration, people that are identified with specific needs, such as children at risk and victims of Sexual and Gender-Based violence (SGVB), are referred to specialized partners for further assistance. MoSA outreach workers are also on site to provide counselling to families with children, informing them of the education services and other activities available to them at Social Development Centres (SDCs).

Registration teams observed a significant number of Syrians approaching the Office without proper identification. This has recently posed a challenge as registration is contingent upon proof of

nationality. UNHCR is currently devising a plan to address this new trend.

Distribution

Distribution in the North this month faced many obstacles as the security situation posed delays in the delivery of non-food items (NFIs) and some activities were interrupted following clashes in Tripoli.

The distributions from July carried over into August due to unforeseen delays in the procurement of World Food Programme (WFP) food kits. Consequently, July distribution was completed on 14 August, assisting a total of 16,490 individuals (3,298 families).

A significant achievement in this month was the launch of the WFP's food voucher system in the north. Villages in Akkar and Wadi Khaled received WFP food vouchers allowing them to purchase food items of their choice from pre-selected grocery shops. DRC and WFP completed the mapping of shops in Tripoli in preparation for implementing the food voucher system there. Islamic Relief also distributed hygiene kits to displaced Syrian and host Lebanese families in Wadi Khaled and Akkar.

Centralized distribution was halted due to unrest in Tripoli toward the end of the month. The security situation prevented trucks from delivering NFIs to Akkar, as well as posed problems in procuring hygiene kits from the supplier. Furthermore, distribution in Tripoli will be suspended as the site is located in an area heavily affected by the recent clashes. Tripoli's distribution efforts will remain suspended until a safer alternative location is identified.

Education

Increasing the enrolment rate of displaced Syrian children was a priority for UNHCR and partners in August. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) announced it will allow displaced Syrian children to enroll in any public school in north Lebanon. This positive news prompted UNHCR, UNICEF and Save the Children International (SCI) to conduct assessments in a number of schools in the North, ensuring they have the capacity to accommodate displaced Syrian children.

UNHCR, SCI, UNICEF, DRC and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) also conducted a number of outreach activities to inform families about the education services available to them. Counseling services stressed the importance of maintaining normalcy in displaced children's lives through school attendance.

UNHCR, SCI and UNICEF met with school principals from 226 schools in Akkar and Tripoli to discuss this year's enrolment procedure and reiterate how UNHCR and SCI will cover the school fees of all registered displaced Syrians enrolling in Lebanese public schools.

Health

The High Relief Commission's (HRC) inability to cover the costs of secondary health care due to a lack of funding was the largest challenge for UNHCR and partners this month. The HRC nevertheless managed to cover the cost of hospitalization for the wounded.

UNHCR and the International Medical Corps (IMC) cover fully the costs of diagnostic tests and consultations for registered children under the age of five

and pregnant women, with all others benefitting from 85% coverage.

Simultaneously, UNHCR and IMC are looking for alternative avenues to cover the gaps in secondary health care provision. Urgent medical cases are currently being referred to the Qatari Red Crescent (QRC), the Arab Medical Doctors and the Islamic Coalition of NGOs. 141 displaced Syrians were hospitalized this month, under the coverage of QRC, Arab Medical Doctors and the Coalition.

The mental health of the displaced community is also of paramount importance to UNHCR and partner health organizations. IMC provides health awareness sessions and psycho-social support services in Akkar, Wadi Khaled, Halba and Tripoli. Sessions this month addressed the importance of maintaining proper personal hygiene, food safety, child health, nutrition for pregnant women, breastfeeding, and immunization. A total of 3,379 beneficiaries have attended health awareness sessions since September.

Shelter

The increasing number of Syrians fleeing to north Lebanon requires that additional shelter options are identified in order to meet the needs of a growing displaced population.

The majority of the displaced Syrians in Akkar and Wadi Khaled are living with Lebanese host families. The host community has generously hosted Syrian families since the onset of violence. However, the prolonged conflict has meant that many Lebanese border villages have reached their maximum capacity. In Tripoli, 79% of the registered displaced population claimed to be living in rented accommodations and are now

facing economic hardship as their savings are depleting. UNHCR, DRC and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) are looking for sustainable solutions to address the growing shelter needs.

53 displaced Syrian families are living in six operational schools in Wadi Khaled. They need to be relocated before the start of the academic year. UNHCR protection team with DRC outreach workers visited the families to discuss relocation options. Many started looking for other options within Lebanon while others decided to return to Syria. UNHCR identified a school in Tekrit for the relocation of the concerned families. The agreement to use this school is expected to be signed this week, after which it will undergo minor rehabilitation.

NRC is supporting the minor rehabilitation of 165 homes across Akkar, currently hosting 1,070 displaced Syrians (214 families). A total of 78 homes have completed renovations. Additionally, 12 unfinished houses in Wadi Khaled are undergoing rehabilitation works with the capacity to host 285 individuals (57 families). The distribution of shelter toolkits came to an end with a total of 133 kits distributed to Syrian families throughout Akkar.

Assistance in the Bekaa Valley

Protection

Providing protection to displaced Syrians is a priority for UNHCR and partners. Through a multi-faceted approach that incorporates community awareness-raising, protection monitoring via assistance activities and information gathering, UNHCR and partners work to ensure the safety of the displaced community.

The security situation poses a challenge for UNHCR and partners, often limiting access to families, especially in north Bekaa. This past month witnessed reports of Syrians being kidnapped in the Bekaa. Assistance activities were modified when necessary in order to avoid putting the displaced in a vulnerable position by gathering large groups.

UNHCR and partner field teams regularly visit border areas to identify new arrivals in need of assistance and guarantee they are referred to the appropriate partners.

Registration/Numbers

A total of 17,827 Syrians (3,846 families) have been registered with UNHCR in the Bekaa. There was an increase in the number of Syrians arriving to the Bekaa at the end of August, with local charities and authorities reporting about 2,200 people arriving in the last week. This represents close to double the recent weekly average.

New arrivals come mainly from Damascus, Dara'a and Aleppo and are concentrated in the Aarsal, Baalbeck and Qab Elias areas.

Centralized registration targeted 4,941 people (948 families) in central Bekaa this month, and will continue in Baalbeck starting 4 September. Approximately 10,000 additional Syrians have been in contact with UNHCR in the Bekaa for registration appointments, a positive reflection of the information campaigns aimed at communicating the safety benefits and assistance provided with registering.

There still remains reluctance, however, from the displaced community in providing the personal information required for the registration process.

This apprehension is to be expected as many have endured traumatic experiences fleeing Syria in addition to the events witnessed back home. UNHCR and partners reassure families that registration is essential in receiving proper protection, health care, education and distribution assistance.

The security situation required some registration activities to be cancelled, but have currently resumed to normal.

Distribution

Over 29,000 displaced Syrians (over 5,500 families) received food vouchers, non-food items, food and hygiene kits, mattresses, sanitary napkins and baby kits in August. Distribution in the Bekaa is facilitated by UNHCR, DRC, WFP, UNFPA, WV, International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center (CLMC).

Local actors are also involved, and building their capacity is integral to ensuring a comprehensive distribution response. DRC provides logistical support to these organizations, as well as covers the rental fees of a warehouse in Saadnayel to assure that all organizations are collaboratively working to meet the needs of displaced Syrians.

Communities are targeted across the Bekaa region, assisting Syrians living in Al Qaa, Aarsal, Al Ain, Al Fakha, Al Hermel and Al Marj. The majority receive assistance through centralized distribution, however UNHCR and partners also distribute to Syrians living in remote areas via door-to-door efforts. It is a challenge to meet the needs of the increasing number of new arrivals, which now include Lebanese returnees. UNHCR and partners regularly coordinate and monitor new arrivals to ensure that all

those needing food and non-food items are assisted.

Education

UNHCR and partners focused this month on preparing both Syrian children and the administrators of Lebanese public schools for the upcoming academic year.

Meetings were held with over 250 public school directors to discuss the capacity for enrolling Syrian children as well as the assistance UNHCR, UNICEF and Save the Children International (SCI) will provide. In addition to assistance with registering children at schools, UNHCR and partners will provide material support (uniforms, notebooks, school bags) as well as help to local teachers.

A trend noticed by partners this month was the unending motivation and excitement Syrian children have expressed for learning and resuming their studies. Children are bored, eager to return to school and inspired to learn English and French for the Lebanese curriculum. This is a positive development that UNHCR and partners are fostering among youth, and reiterating to families who are hesitant in enrolling their children in school.

The security situation, however, poses a particular challenge for implementing education activities in the Bekaa. Parents heard rumors this month about an increased potential of children being kidnapped if they were to send them to school. UNHCR and partners addressed this fear by providing transportation to school, with social workers present on every school bus to accompany the children. This is necessary as many schools are located in remote areas of the Bekaa.

Health

Access to primary and secondary health care was the largest challenge for UNHCR and partner organizations in the Bekaa this month.

There continues to be urgency in addressing the provision of secondary health care, however access to primary health and mental health services is equally important. UNHCR and the International Medical Corporation (IMC) support displaced Syrians in the Bekaa with primary health care services, while IMC also commenced a mental health care programme that will be conducted through the primary health care centres, and at homes, shelters and hospitals.

The health of displaced Syrians is often linked to other aspects of the assistance. For example, there was an increased number of diarrhea and vomiting cases this month, especially in the collective shelters. This can improve by addressing WASH conditions.

Shelter/ Water and Sanitation (WASH)

Provision of shelter remains one of the most pressing concerns in the Bekaa, with this month experiencing heightened pressure to find suitable shelter solutions for new arrivals and Syrians living in operational schools.

On 27 August, 20 families were evicted from a school in al-Marj, west Bekaa but after intervention by UNHCR, MoSA and partner organizations they were permitted to stay. UNHCR and partners are now waiting for permission from the Government to renovate unused buildings to serve as additional shelter. One of these buildings is a school located in Kamed el Loz, which has the capacity to shelter all 20 families who were evicted.

Additional shelter options include refurbishing buildings and offering cash for shelter grants to the most vulnerable. Telephone hotlines were established to receive calls from Syrians receiving pressure to vacate schools, with over 20 reports recently received. Since not all displaced Syrians have access to a phone, UNCHR and partners maintain constant communication with local authorities and displaced communities to ensure that no more families are evicted.

In addition to identifying shelter options, the challenge of safely rehabilitating these buildings and upholding them to WASH standards remains. UNICEF and Action Contra la Faim (ACF) introduced a water voucher system this month to ensure that potable water is accessible to families in the Bekaa. Further discussions with partner agencies will continue to address WASH needs.

*For more information on Syrian displacement in Lebanon, please visit the Lebanon page on the webportal:
<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>. There you will find facts, figures, and ‘who does what’, as well as updates on food and non-food items distributed per area and by agency.*