

UN Inter-Agency Response for Syrian Refugees

Beirut, December 2012



Highlights of the month

- Over 24,000 Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR in December;
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres and EU Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva visited Syrian refugees in the Bekaa and met with Government officials as well as NGO partners to discuss the humanitarian response for Syrian refugees;
- UNHCR and partners launched the fourth Regional Response Plan (RRP), appealing for \$1 billion USD to assist a projected 1 million Syrian refugees in the region by June 2013. From this appeal, \$267 million USD has been requested for Lebanon for a planned refugee population of up to 300,000 persons; Palestinian refugees, Lebanese returnees and Lebanese host communities are also included in the RRP as target beneficiaries;
- Over 580,000 winterization items, as well as World Food Programme (WFP) food vouchers, food parcels for newly arrived families, hygiene and baby kits have been distributed to Syrian refugees to date;
- Over 6,700 families have had their homes weatherproofed for winter, and an additional 5,300+ families have received renovations on their homes this year;
- More than 10,000 Syrian refugee children are registered for school, with enrolment closing on January 15. UNHCR, MEHE and education partners offer Accelerated Learning courses to students in need of extra assistance while transitioning to the Lebanese curriculum, as well as to children in areas where school capacity is filled.



Donors



Funding is also received in private donations from the following countries: China, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, and Spain.

¹ EU funding is received from DEVCO and ECHO.

Registration and New Arrivals

This month, the number of Syrian refugees recorded by UNHCR in Lebanon reached 170,637. Out of these, 126,724 are registered with UNHCR and 43,913 are scheduled to be registered.

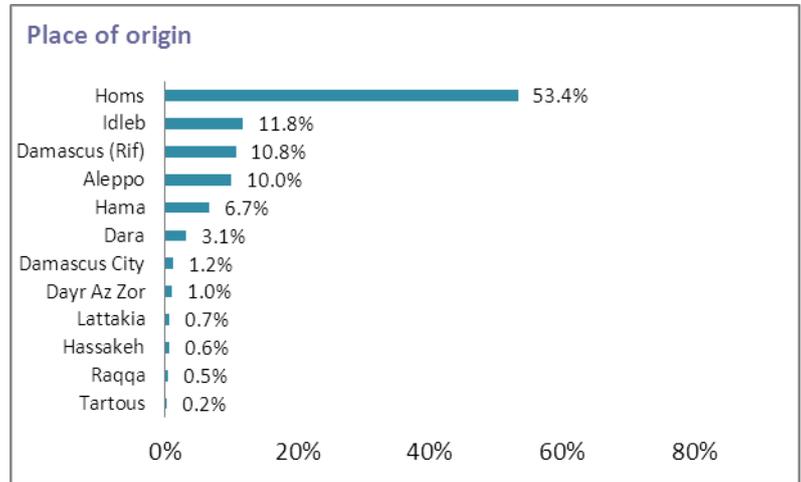
UNHCR registered more than 24,000 refugees in December in its registration centers Tripoli, Beirut, the Bekaa, and south Lebanon as well as through mobile registration teams.

The current distribution of registered refugees is as follows:

North Lebanon: 64,798

Bekaa: 49,692

Beirut and South Lebanon: 12,234



Refugees who are pending registration are assisted with WFP food kits, and DRC baby kits and mattresses. UNHCR is entering into partnership arrangements with selected local charities and municipalities in the North and the Bekaa with a view to assist vulnerable newly arrived refugees pending registration. UNHCR will be pre-positioning NFI stocks in partners' warehouses, on a revolving basis. Post-distribution monitoring will be undertaken by UNHCR.

Protection

December marked the launch of the Lebanese Government's Refugee Response Plan setting out areas of government engagement totaling \$178 million USD, as well as the fourth Regional Response Plan (RRP) appealing for \$267 million USD to assist a projected 300,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon in the coming period. These plans are timely as they reflect an increased need to protect and meet the most basic needs of rising numbers of Syrian and Palestinian refugees spread across the country. The Government plan will be discussed at a Lebanese Cabinet meeting next week. Discussions are underway with the Government to try and merge both the Government Plan and the RRP into one consolidated document.

This month, UNHCR and partner agencies launched a birth registration awareness campaign aimed at alerting refugee parents of the urgent need to register their children at birth. Among registered refugees, over 550 Syrian babies were born in Lebanon since the outset of the crisis, as many young mothers have fled Syria while pregnant and had to deliver in Lebanon. Statelessness experts trained outreach workers throughout December on counseling refugees about the urgent need to register their children at birth to entitle them to the Syrian nationality. At the turn of the new year, a comprehensive information campaign in south, east and north Lebanon will be launched to warn refugees on the risks of not officially registering their children.

New arrivals, including 3,000 Palestinian refugees this month, continued to arrive from Damascus, Homs and Aleppo. Most refugees are crossing to Lebanon through eastern borders, as reports of bribes, harassment and targeted shootings on the Syrian side continue to hinder access into Lebanon from the northern border crossings. The majority of refugees continue to enter Lebanon via official border crossings, while a smaller number of people resort to unofficial crossings mainly due to a fear of official crossing points on the Syrian side or due to unsafe roads leading from Homs to the Masnaa border crossing.

The Office is still advocating with the General Security Office (GSO) to regularize the status of Syrians who have entered Lebanon through unofficial borders and to waive the \$200 USD renewal fee. In a meeting last week, the GSO expressed its willingness to facilitate the process. UNHCR is now liaising with the Prime Minister's Office to ensure the proper implementation and operationalization of the decision.

Security

The beginning of this month witnessed deadly clashes between the Tripoli neighborhoods of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, with some 10 people killed and 80 injured. The situation soon returned to normal, however tension remained with regards to the Tal Kalakh ambush. Relatives of the Lebanese victims involved in the incident blocked the Abu Ali roundabout in Tripoli urging for the release of the victims' bodies. Toward the end of the month, bodies began to be handed over by the Syrian authorities and burials were peaceful.

A continuing problem in north Lebanon is the shelling of border villages, namely Boqaiia, Al Noura and Al Bebabiyeh. No Syrian families living in these areas have been injured, and none have expressed a desire to relocate – so far. Nevertheless, UNHCR and staff remain vigilant in providing assistance as well as ensuring that refugee families feel safe.

The Mashari al Qaa area in the Bekaa also witnessed firing from the Syrian side of the border. The shooting reportedly targeted a Lebanese home that was blocking the Syrian Army's view. No casualties or injuries were reported. Relief activities carried on as normal.

Distribution

December's distributions prioritized the provision of winter items, such as heaters, blankets, warm clothing and heating fuel vouchers. Refugees across Lebanon also received World Food Programme (WFP) food vouchers, hygiene and baby kits, mattresses, sanitary napkins and other non-food items through the collective efforts of UNHCR, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), World Vision (WVI), UNICEF, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Sheild and Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center (CLMC). Newly arrived families receive food parcels until they are registered and eligible for food vouchers.

So far, over 600,000 relief items have been distributed, of which are some 70,000 winterization items.

With the large number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the food voucher system proves beneficial as it gives refugees the ability to choose food items of their choice from selected grocers and shops. This also enhances the local economy, bringing much needed business to many impoverished areas of Lebanon where refugees are residing. Reports of fraud, however, pose a challenge to this system as UNHCR and partners received information of shopkeepers raising prices for refugees purchasing items with the WFP vouchers. This is indeed a concern to UNHCR, WFP and partners, with investigations underway to ensure honesty and transparency.

There are now some 13,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria, including the 3,000 Palestinians that recently fled violence in the Yarmouk camp near Damascus. UNHCR and UNRWA work together to meet the needs of all people fleeing Syria, with UNRWA taking the lead on assistance for Palestinian refugees. UNRWA is now providing cash assistance to these Palestinian refugees from Syria, offering \$25 in food vouchers and \$40 in cash vouchers for each newly arrived refugee. It was agreed with UNRWA that this agency could use UNHCR's NFI stocks for Palestinian refugees on a needs basis and pending additional funds being raised by UNRWA.

Education

Over 10,000 Syrian refugee children are currently enrolled in the Lebanese public school system and benefitting from remedial classes, the Accelerated Learning Programme and distribution of school materials. Enrolment will continue through January 15, as UNHCR and partners encourage refugee parents to educate their children through displacement.

As the capacity of Lebanese public schools fills, UNHCR, UNICEF, Caritas, and Save the Children continue to work with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) to strategize ways to ensure all refugee children can proceed with their schooling. Afternoon shifts of the Accelerated Learning Programme will accommodate children in the new year, helping them adjust to the Lebanese school curriculum so that as soon as schools have the capacity, these students can integrate smoothly. This will also keep Syrian students on track for the Lebanese exams, ensuring they receive proper accreditation for their studies.

Of concern this month were reports of Syrian children being bullied at school. UNHCR and partners, alongside MEHE are incorporating methods to identify such cases and refer necessary situations to local police and authorities. Additionally, an information campaign will raise awareness on the basic rights each child should enjoy at school while also notifying children and parents of behavior that is intolerable and should be reported.

Health

UNHCR continues to work closely with the International Medical Corps (IMC) in covering the costs of primary health care -diagnostic testing, basic treatment and the provision of medications- and 85% of the costs of secondary health care and hospitalization. From the outset of the crisis, over 34,122 Syrian refugees received primary health care services including doctor consultations, diagnostic tests, and medication including chronic (e.g. for those with blood pressure problems, diabetes, etc) and 6,285 Syrian refugee patients have been admitted to hospitals. In December, IMC began admitting Syrian patients in Beirut and South hospitals as the number of Syrian nationals registering with our Office in those areas increased notably.

The focus of health actors this month was the provision of awareness sessions among refugees about disease prevention, especially in instances where refugees are living in cramped conditions, in addition to the improvement of mental health services to survivors of gender-based violence and children at risk (children not enrolled in school, minors forced to work to provide for their families, separated children). From the outset, over 7,600 Syrian refugees have benefited from health awareness sessions. These sessions have highly benefited refugees, helping them share their feelings and worries. In addition, UNHCR and IMC have also enhanced the psycho-social response by holding focus group sessions with small refugee groups, encouraging them to share their concerns. UNHCR and IMC have also deployed an additional psychologist to the Bekaa to improve the outreach and counseling capacity through regular refugee visits in the area.

Shelter

December focused on rehabilitating and ‘sealing off’ dwellings to best protect refugees from the harsh winter weather. This initiative has become crucial as many people fled to Lebanon without much warm clothing, and are currently residing in the coldest areas of Lebanon- the North and Bekaa Valley.

Since the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon this year, the dynamic has shifted from people residing with host families toward a majority (56%) who are now renting. UNHCR alongside the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center (CLMC) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) provide plastic sheeting to both rented accommodations and host family homes to close off cracks and spaces where cold air and rain can seep in. So far, over 6,700 people have had their homes weatherproofed and an additional 5,300 have had their homes rehabilitated. Some 10% of host family homes have been sealed off in exchange for providing free rent to refugee families, benefitting both local Lebanese and refugees.

With an estimated 300,000 refugees to be residing in Lebanon by end of June 2013, UNHCR, DRC, NRC and other shelter partners such as Medair, Premiere Urgence (PU-AMI) and Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center (CLMC) are increasing shelter capacity through a variety of options such as identifying and renovating additional collective shelters, completing unfinished homes and erecting semi-permanent shelters.

Providing cash for shelter to support families paying rent is another strategy UNHCR and partners have been exploring. While the situation may evolve along a different trajectory, if at least 50% of Syrian refugees continue to rent in 2013 then by next year over 150,000 people will be in rented accommodations. Due to an increased demand for housing, real estate prices may increase and cash assistance will be an important component in supporting refugees. UNHCR and partners will review the market situation on a regular basis and conduct household economic surveys to ensure the programme complements the needs. To date, over 4,000 people have received cash for shelter, and partners receive an average of 40 referrals per week of families distinguished as vulnerable and eligible for such assistance.

Water and Sanitation

This month, UNHCR, Premiere Urgence (PU-AMI), UNICEF and Action Contre La Faim (ACF) launched different projects in south, east, and north Lebanon aiming to improve water, sanitation and hygiene conditions in refugee shelters. This follows extensive shelter assessments revealing inadequate water standards, and reports on the risk of expansion of water-borne diseases such as tuberculosis.

UNHCR and PU-AMI distributed water filters to 346 refugee families in Sidon, Beirut and the Chouf, and conducted hygiene awareness sessions among over 2,500 registered refugees in the area. PU-AMI also started the upgrading of 137 latrines and showers for host family homes and rented accommodations in the South, Mount Lebanon and Beirut. In the Bekaa, Action Contre La Faim (ACF) constructed 20 shared latrines at Dalhamiye tented settlements, 20 latrines in Jeb Jennin, and another 11 latrines at the Saadnayel tented settlements benefitting hundreds of refugees. In the meantime, assessments in the area are ongoing. Different tented settlement sites where the construction of latrines is needed have been identified. The implementation of these projects will begin at the turn of the New Year. Also throughout December, UNICEF distributed 1,053 water filters and over 11,000 water vouchers (1,000 liter water vouchers) delivered to the benefit of some 10,000 people.