

UN Inter-Agency Response for Syrian Refugees

Beirut, February 15 – February 22, 2013



Highlights of the week

- UNHCR registered more than 10,000 Syrian refugees this week;
- The Official border crossing of Al Arida in north Lebanon closed on Monday February 18 due to overnight shelling from the Syrian side;
- Over 60,000 winter clothes vouchers, electric heaters, blankets, pillows, mattresses, hygiene and baby kits were distributed this week;
- Over 17,700 World Food Programme (WFP) food vouchers and 5,000 fuel coupons were distributed to refugees across the country;
- Over 3,165 newly arrived Syrian refugees were visited, counselled and assisted this week
- An open strike was launched on Wednesday by school teachers and public servants who protested outside government headquarters across Lebanon and demanded a pay raise;
- Some 3,000 refugee patients received primary health care services this week;
- Over 650 patients were admitted to IMC, Caritas, and Makhzoumi Foundation-supported hospitals in Beirut, north Lebanon and the Bekaa.



Donor contributions for 2013



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

More than 305,753 Syrian refugees receive protection and assistance from the Government of Lebanon, UN and NGO partners. Out of this number, some 195,000 are registered with UNHCR and 110,655 are scheduled to be registered. Since last week, UNHCR registered more than 10,000 Syrian refugees.

The pace of refugees entering Lebanon remains relatively steady, with the majority continuing to arrive from Homs, Idlib, Damascus and Aleppo.

Current distribution of the registered population is as follows:

North Lebanon: 112,384

Bekaa: 97,108

Beirut and Mount Lebanon: 51,283

South Lebanon: 44,978

The majority of refugees continue to enter Lebanon through official border crossings, namely the Masnaa border as northern borders are becoming increasingly dangerous from the Syrian side. In north Lebanon, most newly arrived families choose to first settle in Halba as they feel safest in that area. Syrians who are more acquainted with the South or Bekaa due to connections with friends or family settle there hoping to find opportunities to work.

Different efforts to increase the registration capacity have helped speed up the process. Despite the overall increase in the number of people approaching our Office to register, people now have to wait less and less to be interviewed by UNHCR. The average waiting period today is just under two and a half months. The Office continues to work on a set of strategies to reduce this period further. In the Bekaa, a total of 4,352 people were registered this week, which represents an increase of 18% from the registration pace during the same period last week. The new registration sites in the Bekaa and South scheduled to open soon will have a much greater impact on registration schedules. Today, an average of 2,000 people are registered daily at UNHCR's four registration centres across the country. The Office is also looking at creating a parallel mobile registration effort targeting particularly vulnerable refugees who present serious protection or health concerns and who are not able to commute to the different registration centers.

Protection

Throughout the past week, UNHCR scaled up efforts to reach out to minority groups who feel reluctant to approach our Offices to register. UNHCR held information sessions and focus group discussions with different minority groups. The meetings helped raise awareness about the registration process, objective and confidentiality. Following these meetings, a considerable number of people felt more comfortable to take registration appointments.

UNHCR and partners heavily rely on registration and home visits to identify protection needs or concerns and refer refugees to the appropriate services. Vulnerable women, people with particular mental health needs, and children at risk –including children who are out of school, who arrived to Lebanon with extended family members, or who arrived to Lebanon alone- were identified through these processes this week and referred to different services accordingly. UNICEF also held awareness-raising sessions about gender-based violence with 150 women and girls

attending its community centers in Aarsal and Berqayel. Among those women, those with particular needs benefited from private counselling sessions and/or were referred to specialized partners for assistance.

Security

The Official border crossing of Al Arida in north Lebanon closed on Monday February 18 due to overnight shelling from the Syrian side. UNHCR was informed that the shelling hit a mosque and other buildings in the coastal village. No casualties were reported.

Distribution

UNHCR, UNICEF, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Amel Association, Makhzoumi Foundation, World Vision and Caritas Lebanon Migrant Centre distributed over 60,000 winter clothes vouchers, electric heaters, blankets, pillows, mattresses, and hygiene and baby kits this week. In addition, over 17,700 World Food Programme (WFP) food vouchers and 5,000 fuel coupons were distributed to refugees across the country.

UNHCR also assisted refugees pending registration with basic items through municipalities and local charities. In addition, the Danish Refugee Council, Caritas Lebanon Migrant Centre and partner agencies are visiting newly arrived refugees to assess their needs and provide them with essentials such as heating tools and hygiene kits. Over 3,165 newly arrived Syrian refugees were visited, counselled and assisted this week.

Education

This week was marked by the launch of an open strike held by school teachers and public servants who protested outside government headquarters across Lebanon and demanded a pay raise. Most private and public schools shut down across Lebanon in response to the Union Coordination Committee's - a coalition of private and public school teachers and public sector employees- call for a daylong strike on Wednesday, that later escalated into an open strike. In the meantime, both Syrian and Lebanese students are not attending school. This lost school year time will be made up to all students at the end of the academic year.

Education partners continue to focus on the provision of remedial classes, accelerated learning programmes and other activities aiming to help Syrian students keep up with the Lebanese curriculum. A public school principal in Baalbek explained that attendance and adaptation among most children under 12 years old was consistent and positive. This group age proved able to quickly adapt to the Lebanese educational system and pick up the English or French languages taught as part of the national curriculum quickly. Conversely, children between 12 and 17 years old faced more difficulty keeping up with Lebanese students their age. UNICEF, UNHCR, Save the Children, World Vision, Amel Association, and Caritas Lebanon Migrant Centre have all developed educational programmes catered to the needs of this group throughout the North, Bekaa, Beirut and South. In order to gain refugee parents' trust in these pedagogical programmes, agencies conduct regular home visits to inform families of the presence and purpose of these extra-curricular classes. Public schools have also started to provide afternoon school support to Lebanese and Syrian children facing some difficulties in school.

UNHCR and UNESCO in Beirut organized a three-day training targeting all education stakeholders working on the Syrian response in order to prepare for an education needs assessment across Lebanon that will later inform the

programme for the coming months. In addition, UNICEF distributed fuel to heat classrooms in over 60 schools in the North and Bekaa.

Health

Some 3,000 refugee patients approached UNHCR, International Medical Corps (IMC), Amel Association, Caritas and Makhzoumi foundation-supported primary health care clinics in Beirut, Bazourieh, Tyre, Al Ain, Tripoli, Akkar, Wadi Khaled, and the Bekaa valley, to receive consultations including dental, diagnostic services, prenatal care, medications, vaccinations and referrals. In light of the harsh weather and living conditions, respiratory infections and skin diseases were among the most common health conditions treated this week.

In addition, over 650 patients were admitted to IMC, Caritas, and Makhzoumi Foundation-supported hospitals in Beirut, north Lebanon and the Bekaa, including 63 cases in need of emergency treatment. UNHCR continued to expedite the registration of those refugees in urgent need of secondary healthcare, in order to provide them with immediate support especially when they require urgent admission to the hospital. On the mental health front, 454 clinical and social consultations were conducted this week through both IMC's outreach and centre-based services.

The nationwide vaccination campaign led by UNICEF continued this week with over 180,000 Syrian and Lebanese children up to the age of 18 have been vaccinated against measles, over 46,000 children up to the age of 5 immunized against polio, and over 110,000 children have been provided with vitamin A supplements.

In order to strengthen the reproductive health response, UNFPA met with 16 local and international NGOs and UN agencies on February 18 in order to ensure that all reproductive health interventions are properly coordinated, and are complementary and responsive to the needs. During the meeting, partners revised the reproductive health guidelines and agreed on an action plan for the months to come. Furthermore, IMC held a two day training targeting health care providers on clinical management for gender-based violence survivors in the North in partnership with ABAAD. Fifteen participants from different clinics and hospitals attended the training.

IMC and Save the Children health awareness sessions continue to prove successful in raising refugees' awareness about physical and mental health and hygiene. A gamut of health topics are addressed on a weekly basis including family planning, pre/postnatal care, gender-based violence prevention, early marriage, and child care and nutrition. A total of 961 individuals took part in health awareness sessions this past week through public health care centres and mobile medical units. These sessions are particularly useful as individual health cases needing further care are referred to the appropriate health care providers.

UNHCR continues to coordinate with partners in order to ensure that comprehensive primary health care services are provided and that refugees have full access to primary health care centres. UNHCR is currently assessing these centres' needs in order to fill present gaps.

Shelter

UNHCR and partner agencies have stepped up their shelter response as Syrian refugees face more and more difficulty in identifying appropriate and affordable accommodation. Many refugee families are having to move from place to place before they are able to settle down. Rents have increased notably in areas where there are known concentrations of refugees. Over 60 per cent of refugees are renting accommodation across Lebanon, with the remaining 40 per cent being accommodated in host family homes, collective shelters or scattered tented settlement in the Bekaa valley or north Lebanon.

. Vulnerable refugees who are not able to pay their own rent were provided with financial assistance to cover their monthly rent. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) signed contracts with 71 Lebanese owners of unfinished houses in the Bekaa and Akkar to begin rehabilitation works in these houses which in turn will host Syrian refugees for one year free of charge. Premiere Urgence (PU-AMI) selected 45 families in need of shelter rehabilitation and will begin works in those houses in the coming week. In parallel, UNHCR and partners monitored the progress on ongoing house rehabilitations through regular visits. The need for sealing-off of houses has decreased as this activity has targeted most families that needed it and weather conditions have relatively improved in the North and Bekaa.

In addition to the regular shelter programme, and as many refugees arrive in Lebanon with no clear idea where to go and who to seek assistance from, UNHCR and partner shelter experts focused on mapping out refugees who live in informal collective shelters across Lebanon. Many of the identified refugees live in substandard conditions and need immediate assistance. UNHCR referred all those refugees to registration while directing them to adequate partners to receive immediate basic assistance. In Tripoli, five newly arrived refugee families were provided with a safe shelter through UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council in Abde, a collective shelter already hosting refugees.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programmes continued this week to improve refugees' living conditions and better protect them from water borne diseases. UNHCR and Premiere Urgence (PU-AMI) constructed six emergency toilets in the Ouzai collective shelter in Saida, and is in the process of constructing 16 toilets and showers at the same shelter. In addition, UNHCR and PU-AMI identified 21 families in the Chouf that need upgrading of their sanitation facilities (toilet/showers). In the Bekaa, Action Contre La Faim (ACF) constructed six new toilets and installed 95 hand washing points at different tented settlements in the area. DRC also distributed 10,132 hygiene kits and 5,264 baby kits to registered refugees throughout Lebanon this week.