

Precarious living conditions for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Jordan

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The Age & Disability Monitor provides an overview of the most pressing issues and needs faced by persons with specific needs (PSN), including people with disabilities (PwD), people with injuries (PwI), and older people (OP) among the refugees from Syria. It also highlights inclusive interventions by humanitarian actors, which successfully address special needs arising from these cross-cutting vulnerabilities.

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Ebtesam, Syrian refugee who is living with her 3 children, her sisters and her nephew in Za'atari camp in the north of Jordan.



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Families that include persons with specific needs face more difficulties in finding safe and adequate shelter compared to other families – according to the findings of the HelpAge International/Handicap International assessment in Jordan and Lebanon.¹

As the Syria crisis unfolds into a chronic emergency in Lebanon and Jordan four years since the outbreak of civil war, finding adequate access to shelter for Syrian refugees becomes increasingly challenging. The needs are particularly acute and urgent for those households that include **persons with disabilities, injuries, and chronic diseases**. With the onset of winter, those particularly vulnerable people not only need a physically accessible shelter but also a place that is **warm** and **safe** and insures **privacy**.

Overall Shelter Situation

In Lebanon, the Government has not authorized the establishment of formal camps. Thus, refugees resort to widely varying shelter options including rental of existing apartments or houses, informal settlements², unfinished buildings or commercial/factory spaces, collective centres and hosting by Lebanese families. For refugees who are no longer able to afford their current residence or have chosen to reduce their share of their monthly household expenditure devoted to shelter, households choose to live in informal settlements³ which are scattered in over 1,750 locations.⁴ Within this context, poor quality shelter, overcrowding, limited access to water, sanitation, and public services are the norm throughout the country for the vast majority of vulnerable refugees.⁵

In Jordan, the majority of Syrian refugees do not reside in camps but rather in host communities⁶. Amman governorate has the largest population of urban refugees at 27.7%, followed by Mafraq governorate at 25.6%, Irbid governorates at 23.3% and Zarqa governorate at 10.9%⁷. Unlike Lebanon, Jordan has three major refugee camps with a total of 96,968 Syrian refugees. The largest refugee camp is Za'atari with 81,776 Syrian refugees; second to Za'atari is Azraq refugee camp with 11,197 refugees and then Emirati Jordanian Camp with 3,995 refugees⁸.

The large number of Syrian refugees in host communities has adversely affected the cost of living- specifically, the cost of rent through the decrease in available housing stock. An additional 86,000 housing units are estimated to be needed to meet Jordan's immediate housing demand; more than double the country's annual average need of 32,000 units⁹. As a result, rental prices have risen by up to 200%-300% of pre-crisis rates in some areas¹⁰. Handicap International post monitoring distribution report for cash transfers in Jordan found out that 62% of the approximately 2,000 older persons and persons with disabilities provided with cash assistance in 2014 spent it on paying rent¹¹.

The **number of informal settlements** have multiplied by 3 between July 2013 and May 2013 in Lebanon. 80% of refugees in Lebanon rent accommodation paying an average of \$200USD per month¹². For severely vulnerable refugees¹³, this amounts to 200% their average monthly income¹⁴. In Lebanon, adequate shelter conditions are not affordable. The majority of the 53,000 Palestinian refugees who were displaced from Syria live in pre-existing Palestinian refugee camps and gatherings, hosted by Palestinian refugees already in Lebanon¹⁵, thus putting more pressure on the already precarious living conditions of existing camps.

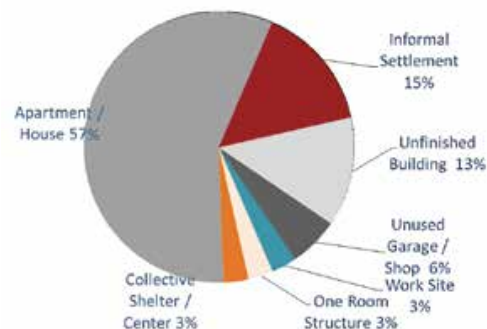
In Jordan, according to REACH (2014), one-fifth of Syrian refugee households in Jordan are reported to be living in substandard accommodation, many of them in emergency or temporary shelters, with informal settlements situated across the northern governorates¹⁶.



Breakdown of refugee shelter types in Lebanon



Kitchen in a shelter is shared by three refugee households in one informal settlement in North Halba, Lebanon.



Few housing rights

With the constant increase of rental costs, many refugees are more and more unable to pay their rents, which exposes them to eviction especially in the Bekaa and in the North. Evictions are not only the result of economic vulnerability. The lack of proper written rented agreements is also a reason to be expelled from one's home (only 10% of the of refugees possess such documentation). Evictions are sometimes carried out without proper notification and often without a required court order. In addition, eviction threats are increasingly triggered by a growing impatience felt within hosting communities with the ongoing and increasing refugee presence¹⁷.

In Jordan, the high cost of renting coupled with the lack of houses has forced both Jordanians and Syrians to resort to a range of coping strategies; from selling household assets and inhabiting unfinished buildings, to living with extended family¹⁸. Handicap International through its outreach reported a substantial increase in the number of beneficiaries failing to pay their rent and utility bills in Irbid governorate¹⁹. Furthermore, there is an increase in the number of refugees returning from non-camp settings to Za'atari camp²⁰. The Protection working group in Za'atari reported approximately 100 families returning to the camp on a weekly basis. Although the reasons for returning to camp was not established, the assumption by UNHCR is that most families are facing high cost of living in non-camp and urban settings.

People with Specific Needs

at greater risk in precarious shelters

In both Jordan and Lebanon, households with more **people suffering from a chronic disease** are more likely to declare limited access to shelter which suggests that more of the household income by be spent on healthcare, thus limiting their access to shelter²¹.

According to an analysis of Handicap International's database, a **higher proportion (34%) of persons with specific needs including persons with disabilities or injuries**, live in **informal settlements** as compared to the overall Syrian refugee population (15%). This shows that households with specific needs do not have the same opportunities as other refugee families in accessing safe and adequate shelter²². For example, almost **none of the outdoor latrines constructed in informal settlements are accessible**; thus persons with disabilities, chronic conditions or those with mobility issues such as older people, will not be able to access latrines without daily help from a caregiver.

Similarly, one **extra person injured in the family** is associated with increased problems finding shelter. Assessment findings also show that when families with specific needs have found shelter, they are more likely to live in **inadequate shelters** than other refugee families. Shelters are likely to be more **unsafe, poorly insulated, damp, cramped, lacking privacy and without running water**. Cold and damp conditions have negative impacts on older people's conditions such as osteoarthritis and joint pain, and can cause manageable conditions to become acute and debilitating. Moreover, inappropriate shelter can confine older people and people with disabilities in their homes, increasing their dependence on other family members, and restricting their ability to access services and engage in livelihood and social activities²³.

An assessment of persons with specific needs and their households conducted in Beirut and Mount Lebanon by MPDL confirmed HAI/Hi findings noting that, **poorly winterised shelters** was cited as having **direct effects on health conditions** of persons with specific needs as well as other household members²⁴.

The Response

Humanitarian agencies in Lebanon are working in a number of ways to meet the shelter needs of refugees. Humanitarian actors providing shelter assistance identify vulnerable refugee households amongst those determined to be living in insecure dwellings. Current data shows that this group accounts for 40% of the refugees. Support is provided to weather-proof²⁶ unfinished houses, garages, worksites and informal settlements as well as to rehabilitate small shelter units and collective centres. These include :

- Weather-proofing of informal settlements or unfinished houses;
- Rehabilitation of Lebanese homes in exchange for providing accommodation to refugees;
- Identification and rehabilitation of private and public buildings to serve as collective shelters for refugees;
- Procurement of shelter and construction materials at local markets²⁷.



Ahmed was attempting to winterize his shelter last year when he fell and broke his leg. He is living in an informal settlement with 20 tents sharing 3 latrines; all are inaccessible for persons with mobility issues.

A look at winter ahead:

Increasing refugee numbers and dwindling resources

With increasing numbers of refugees and decreasing funding, providing winter assistance to all in need of support will not be possible. Consequently, vulnerability criteria is agreed upon among relief actors to prioritize the more needy families . Cash transfers will be used to cover basic winter needs. Families will be prioritized based on:

- Substandard shelter: 70% of the estimated proportion of those residing in substandard housing to be provided weatherproofing materials;
- Populations living at higher altitudes will be prioritized for different levels of cash assistance²⁸ ;
- Winter clothing vouchers for children;
- Distribution of core relief items for newly arrived refugees;
- School heating.



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Mohammed's leg and partial hip was amputated as a result of a gunshot wound in Syria. He is living in a small room rehabilitated by PU-AMI with his wife, son and daughter in Lebanon.

Towards operationalizing a strategic shelter response

The 2014 Shelter Strategy and the guidelines on rehabilitation of small shelter units in Lebanon makes clear reference to an **age, gender and diversity approach** as a guiding principle noting that “particular attention must be paid to those who have traditionally been excluded and disenfranchised, that is, women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and minority groups.”^{29,30} Whilst on a strategic level, the specific needs of older persons or persons with disabilities may be articulated, *how this is operationalized*, is dependent on the individual initiatives of respective organizations providing assistance and funding availability.

Recommendations

- ▶ *All Syrian refugees should have access without discrimination to safe and appropriate shelter that meets humanitarian requirements (weather proofed, available water and sanitation facilities, etc...). Families with specific needs should be prioritized as they are often the most affected;*
- ▶ *Ensure that age, gender and disability data is collected at the time assessments are being conducted to be taken into account when shelter support is determined;*
- ▶ *Adapt rehabilitation of small shelter units and make them accessible to the specific needs of older persons, persons with chronic illnesses, persons with disabilities and otherwise face mobility challenges;*
- ▶ *Prioritize those with mobility challenges to reside on the ground floor, whenever possible;*
- ▶ *Ensure that prioritization for winter assistance includes consideration for the vulnerability of persons with disabilities or injuries, older persons and persons with chronic conditions;*

GOOD NEWS: Medair improving accessibility for persons with specific needs in diverse shelter conditions

Endnotes

- 1 Hidden victims of the Syrian crisis: disabled, injured and older refugees. HelpAge and Handicap International. October 2013. Accessed at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Hidden%20victims%20of%20the%20Syrian%20Crisis%20April%202014%20-%20Embargoed%2000.01%209April.pdf>
- 2 "Informal settlements" refers to groups of tents or other makeshift structures that have been erected on agricultural land.
- 3 Housing, Land & Property Issues in Lebanon: Implications of the Syrian Refugee Crisis." UN Habitat/UNHCR. August 2014. Accessed at: <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HousingLandandPropertyIssuesinLebanonFINAL.pdf>.
- 4 "UNHCR Lebanon Shelter Update." UNHCR. September 2014. Accessed at <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=7491>
- 5 UN Habitat/UNHCR. Op Cit.
- 6 Joint Assessment Review of Syrian Refugee Response in Jordan. (2013) UNHCR, UNICEF & WFP
- 7 Syria Regional Refugee Response – Jordan. UNHCR November 2014. Accessed at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>
- 8 Syria Regional Refugee Response – Jordan. UNHCR. November 2014. Accessed at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>
- 9 Housing and Tension in Jordanian Communities Hosting Syrian Refugees. REACH. June 2014. Accessed at: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=7157>
- 10 REACH. Ibid.
- 11 Post Distribution Monitoring Report – Cash Transfer. Handicap International, Jordan. April 2014. (internal).
- 12 "Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: A Constant Struggle for Shelter." UNHCR. May 23, 2014. Accessed at: <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=6309>
- 13 Household expenditure below the survival minimum expenditure basket (SMEB estimated to be 28% of the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon. Inter-agency Cash Working Group meeting minutes. 28 October 2014.
- 14 "Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: A Constant Struggle for Shelter." UNHCR. May 23, 2014. Accessed at: <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=6309>
- 15 "A Precarious Existence: The Shelter Situation of Refugees from Syria in Neighboring Countries." NRC. June 2014. Accessed at http://www.nrc.no/arch_img/9179861.pdf
- 16 UNHCR, UNICEF & WFP. Op Cit.
- 17 UN Habitat/UNHCR. Op Cit.
- 18 REACH. Op Cit.
- 19 Monthly report, Handicap International. (Internal).
- 20 "Protection Working Group Minutes of meeting, Za'atari." UNHCR. 2014
- 21 HelpAge/Handicap. Op Cit.
- 22 Analysis of Handicap International beneficiary database. Handicap International, Lebanon. July 2014. (Internal).
- 23 HelpAge/Handicap. Op Cit.
- 24 "Assessment of Persons with Specific Needs in Mt Lebanon and South." MPDL. 2014.
- 25 Weatherproofing refers to the provision of insulation materials for structures on informal settlements, or substandard buildings.
- 26 "UNHCR Lebanon Shelter Update." UNHCR. August 2014. Accessed at <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=7226>
- 27 "Lebanon Shelter Working Group, Minutes of Meeting." UNHCR. 08/07/2014. Accessed at: <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=6455>
- 28 USD 100 for households living above 1,100 m and USD 80 for households living between 500-1,100 m and considers a combination of economic vulnerability and exposure to cold to determine eligibility for assistance.
- 29 "Lebanon Shelter Sector Strategy." UNHCR. February 2014. Accessed at: <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=4582>
- 30 "Lebanon Shelter Sector Guidelines on Rehabilitation of Small Shelter Units." UNHCR. March 2014. Accessed at: <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=4715>

Observing that the shelter needs of older refugees and refugees with disabilities are not adequately met, Medair, of its own initiative designed a shelter improvement project initially funded by UNHCR to improve the accessibility and mobility of affected persons in the Bekaa Valley area of Lebanon.

"There are obstructions which make movement within the shelter and the immediate environment very difficult for persons with disabilities. All toilets are squatting toilets, and they lack adequate washing facilities; both these factors make it difficult for a disabled person to maintain an adequate level of personal hygiene without caregiver assistance," says Shelter Program Manager, Andrew Howe.

Intervening in different types of shelters, Medair targets the most vulnerable assessing each household on a case-by-case basis. Tailored interventions can include the provision of ramps, hand rails, levelling of floors, improving wash facilities, door handles, raised sleeping areas. Improvements are coordinated with Handicap International (HI) to compliment mobility equipment distributed by HI.

To date, Medair has currently supported 15 households with older persons (above 64 years of age), persons with various types of impairments (physical/motor, sensorial, mental, intellectual) or children with disabilities. With support provided by ECHO, Medair will support an additional 50 households. Medair is also referring persons with specific needs to appropriate organizations to improve their mobility and independence.



HelpAge International (HAI) and Handicap International (HI) decided to address the exclusion of the most vulnerable, especially older refugees and refugees with disabilities from the humanitarian response to the Syrian Crisis. A partnership between the two organizations aims at supporting the implementation of a principled, inclusive and accessible humanitarian response for all vulnerable Syrian refugees through a Regional Inclusion Programme.

Before and after a Medair shelter improvement being done.

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