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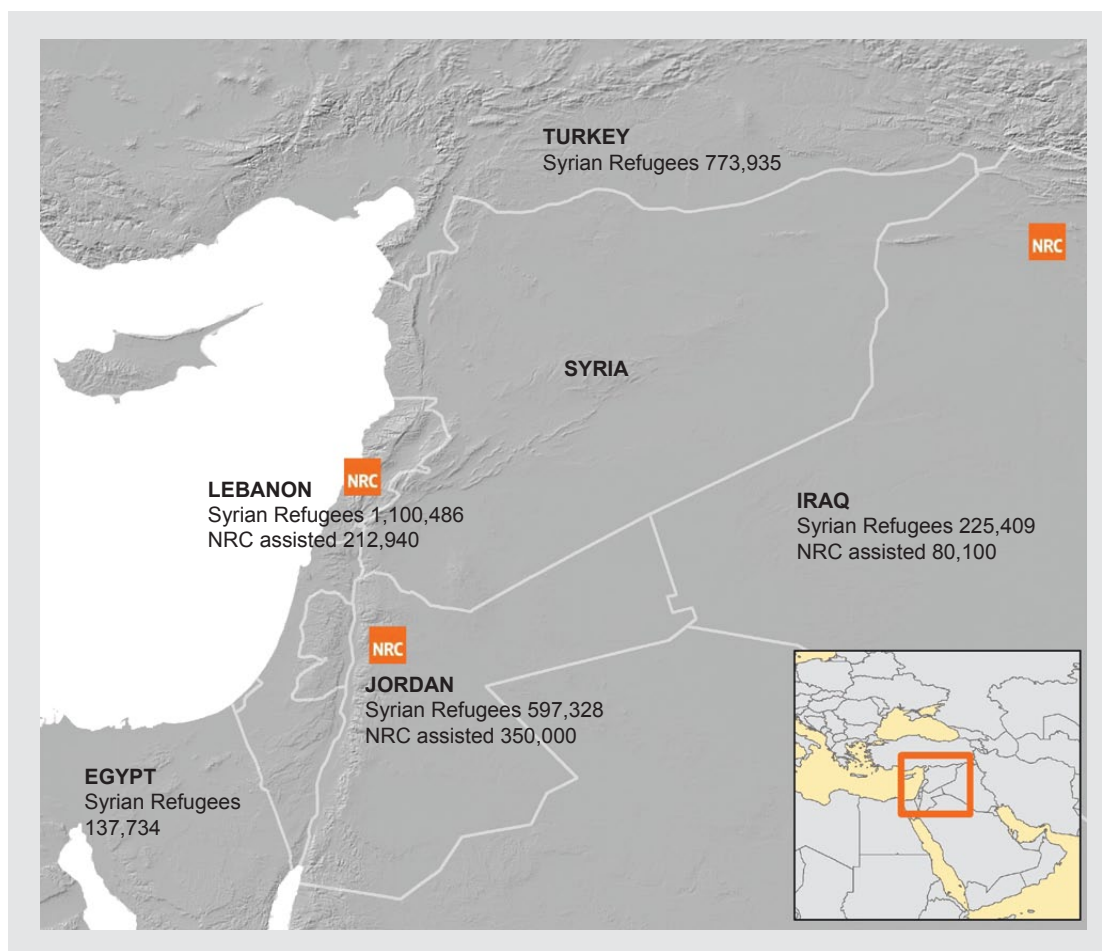
A PRECARIOUS EXISTENCE: THE SHELTER SITUATION OF REFUGEES FROM SYRIA IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

June 2014

An upgraded shelter for a refugee family from Syria in Wadi Khaled, northern Lebanon

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Map of the region displaying numbers of refugees (registered or awaiting registration with UNHCR) and NRC beneficiaries.

More than three years into the Syrian conflict which has led to a protracted humanitarian crisis with regional dimensions, over 2.8 million people have sought safety and protection in neighbouring countries and North Africa. According to UNHCR, the average rate of monthly registrations continues to exceed 100,000 so far in 2014.⁽¹⁾ Of these, it is estimated that 85% live outside of refugee camps.⁽²⁾

Neighbouring countries have exhibited solidarity in hosting unprecedented numbers of refugees, yet even before the Syrian crisis they were experiencing a shortage of affordable housing. The lack of affordable housing has led to hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria living in substandard,

overcrowded and unsuitable accommodation without security of tenure⁽³⁾ and exposed to risks of exploitation and forced eviction. Cycles of secondary displacement in countries neighbouring Syria have been increasing, as refugee families move from place to place in search of adequate and affordable shelter.

Neighbouring countries, in particular Lebanon and Jordan, have noted that these risks are not limited to Syrian refugees as the refugee influx is starting to impact the ability of the poorest segments of host communities to meet their housing needs.

Recent assessments⁽⁴⁾ indicate actual - or fear of - rising rental prices and competition

1. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

2. UNHCR situation update 'Inter-Agency Regional Response for Syrian Refugees', 7-13 June, 2014

3. Legal protection afforded to tenants against arbitrary rent increases and landlord's attempts to repossess the property through eviction.

4. REACH, Evaluating the Effect of the Syrian Refugee Crisis on Stability and Resilience in Jordanian Host Communities; Preliminary Impact Assessment (January 2014).

to secure adequate housing as the two main areas of tension between refugees and host communities.

To date, humanitarian assistance has been insufficient in covering the enormous shelter needs of the Syrian refugees. Moreover much of the assistance has been geared to respond to emergency shelter response in camp settings, as has been the case in Iraq and Jordan. In Lebanon and Jordan in particular, limited development assistance for shelter has been rolled out due to absence of national housing strategies, needed to address chronic short-falls in adequate housing which have been severely compounded by the refugee influx.





“ The majority of refugees in countries neighbouring Syria live in urban settings among the host communities spread throughout villages, towns and cities. ”



NRC Jordan engineering team assessing unfinished housing units in northern Jordan (Georg Schaumberger / NRC)

Where do Refugees from Syria Live?

Camp and Non-Camp Settings in Neighbouring Countries

Host country	Numbers of refugees ⁽⁵⁾ in host country	Shelter situation for refugees from Syria
 Lebanon	1,100,486	<p>16% live in informal settlements (the majority of which pay for rent and/or utilities).</p> <p>25% live in unfinished or sub-standard buildings (the majority of which pay for rent and/or utilities).</p> <p>57% live in finished apartments/houses (the majority of which pay for rent and/or utilities).</p> <p>35% receive some form of (humanitarian) shelter assistance.⁽⁶⁾</p>
 Jordan	597,328	<p>83.7% live outside of camps.</p> <p>16.3% live in camps.</p> <p>50% live in sub-standard shelters.</p> <p>58% of household expenditure is on rent.</p> <p>Rental prices of Syrian refugees in four governorates have increased by 25% or more between 2012 and 2013. ⁽⁷⁾</p>
 Iraq	225,409	<p>55% live outside camps.</p> <p>45% live in camps.⁽⁸⁾</p> <p>89% pay rent.⁽⁹⁾</p> <p>69% pay rent in private house/apartment.</p> <p>24% pay rent in collective house/apartment.</p>
 Turkey	773,935⁽¹⁰⁾	<p>71% live outside camps, mainly in 3 provinces.</p> <p>29% live in 21 government camps across 10 provinces.⁽¹¹⁾</p>

5. Numbers of Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR, or awaiting registration: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> This does not include Palestinian Refugees from Syria.

6. All figures in this box come from the second UNHCR telephone shelter survey, April 2014.

7. All figures in this box come from UNHCR/IRD, Syrian Refugees Living Outside Camps in Jordan – Home Visit Data Findings (2013).

8. UNHCR Regional Response Plan figures as of end of May 2014.

9. REACH Multi-Sector Needs Assessment on KR-I preliminary findings, April 2014.

10. All figures in this column come from UNHCR situation update 'Inter-Agency Regional Response for Syrian Refugees', 7-13 June, 2014.

11. ibid

The majority of refugees in countries neighbouring Syria live in urban settings among the host communities spread throughout villages, towns and cities. This situation has created huge demand for affordable housing in rural, peri-urban and urban settlements, which existing supply cannot fulfil.

In Lebanon, where the government has not authorised the establishment of camps for Syrian refugees, it is estimated that 57% live in finished apartments or houses, the majority of which pay for rent and/or utilities. This equates to an estimated monthly minimum contribution of USD 73.7million to the Lebanese economy.⁽¹²⁾ In addition, 25% live in unfinished or sub-standard buildings and another 16% live in informal settlements,⁽¹³⁾ which are characterised by basic, self-built shelters with poor access to water and sanitation services and uncertainty over status of the land. 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 Lebanon.

In Jordan, only 16.3% of registered Syrian refugees live in camps, such as Zaatari and the newly opened Azraq, while the vast majority live in rural and urban settlements among host communities.⁽¹⁴⁾ This spike in shelter needs has exacerbated the pre-existing shortage of affordable housing in the country.

According to the Jordanian Government in the seven years prior to the Syrian crisis the Jordanian housing market faced an annual shortfall of 3,400 housing units.⁽¹⁵⁾ At this

time, an additional 120,000 new housing units are needed for the current number of registered Syrian refugees in Jordan. This lack of adequate housing forces the majority of Syrian refugees to live in sub-standard accommodation, which is often characterised by earth floors, poor ventilation, mould and outdoor bathrooms.⁽¹⁶⁾ Syrian refugees outside of formal camps in Jordan have reported securing adequate shelter as their single most pressing need.⁽¹⁷⁾ Seven percent of refugees surveyed outside of camps live in informal shelters, such as prefabricated structures and tents.⁽¹⁸⁾

Of the total number of Syrian refugees in Kurdish Iraq (KR-I), approximately 55% live in non-camp settings. In Sulaymaniyah and Erbil Governorates 19% of households living outside camps report that their accommodation is of inadequate quality whereas in Dohuk Governorate the number reporting inadequate accommodation is substantially higher at 33%. Those surveyed reported that their primary concerns were leaking roofs, unhygienic washing facilities, lack of privacy and lack of security.

In Dohuk Governorate, which hosts the largest number of refugees in the country, it is estimated that 30% live outside of the camps constructed by the government, despite the camps being where almost all humanitarian assistance has been focused.

⁽¹⁹⁾

In Turkey, 21% of an estimated 773,935 Syrian refugees live in 22 government-run camps while the rest live in non-camp settings, mainly residing in Turkish cities.⁽²⁰⁾

12. This figure is a rough estimate based on the following calculation: the number of refugees estimated to be paying rent for finished apartments (67% of the total 1,100,486) multiplied by 100USD (the minimum estimate of average monthly rent for finished apartments). Figures come from the UNHCR Lebanon telephone shelter survey, February/March 2014.

13. *ibid*

14. UNHCR data: see <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>.

15. Government of Jordan, National Resilience Plan 2014 – 2016 (final draft 29 May 2014).

16. UNHCR/IRD, Syrian Refugees Living Outside Camps in Jordan – Home Visit Data Findings (2013).

17. CARE, Lives Unseen: Urban Syrian Refugees and Jordanian Host Communities Three Years into the Syrian Crisis (April 2014).

18. UNHCR/IRD, Syrian Refugees Living Outside Camps in Jordan – Home Visit Data Findings (2013).

19. REACH Multi-Sector Needs Assessment in KR-I, April 2014.

20. <https://www.afad.gov.tr/EN/IcerikDetay1.aspx?ID=16&IcerikID=747>.

21. <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-bric-livelihoods-syrian-refugees-lebanon-211113-en.pdf>



Syrian children pose for a photo in their new housing unit in Irbid, Jordan (Georg Schaumberger / NRC)

Lack of Affordability and Rising Economic Vulnerability

Refugees in the region have little opportunity for legal employment, while competition for housing means that rent prices are increasing, as well as tensions with host communities and non-refugee daily labourers. Refugees often have to face difficult economic choices between paying for essential goods and services, such as food, health, education and paying rent. Rent is one of the largest household expenditures. A November 2013 Oxfam survey on the livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Lebanon found that on average monthly rent represented 43% of a Syrian refugee household's monthly expenditure and 90% of its monthly income.⁽²¹⁾ Refugees living in Jordan and Lebanon have mainly relied on paying for their rent through diminishing savings, borrowed money and cash assistance, with increased numbers falling into debt ⁽²²⁾, or resorting to negative coping strategies such as child labour or selling food rations, in order to cover basic living costs.

Many refugees who rent are increasingly unable to pay for the rising rental cost, which exposes them to risk of eviction. Syrian refugees in Jordan reported a 25% increase in rental prices between 2012 and 2013 in key influx areas with the majority of refugees paying around JOD 135 (USD192) per month on rent.⁽²³⁾ The Government of Jordan has noted similar trends for Jordanian tenants in some parts of the country.⁽²⁴⁾ Eighty-nine per cent of Syrian refugee households taking part in a 2013 assessment were

recorded to be in debt with both the number of households reported to be in debt and the amount of debt increasing significantly since baseline surveys in 2012 (Syrian families reported an average debt of JOD 573/USD843).⁽²⁵⁾

In Lebanon, while the main household expenditures are rent, food and medicine, the majority of refugees have not received humanitarian shelter assistance and the assistance that is provided is usually for a limited period, due to limited funding and programme cycles.⁽²⁶⁾

According to internal NRC data from Dohuk Governorate, KR-I, last year many Syrian refugees had poorly paid employment and unstable rental accommodation arrangements within the host communities.

The data also suggested that though many of the 850 interviewed households had secured their own rental accommodation (84% of households assessed pay rent for their accommodation), the high cost of rent (typically more than half of the household income) could force them into lower quality housing situations. This group was struggling to avoid and overcome harmful coping mechanisms associated with the relatively high cost of living in non-camp settings. Some of these coping mechanisms included the decision not to send children to school, (in order to save on transport costs and other school related expenses), and overcrowding of homes to reduce rental costs.

21. <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-bric-livelihoods-syrian-refugees-lebanon-211113-en.pdf>

22. *ibid*

23. UNHCR/IRD, Syrian Refugees Living Outside Camps in Jordan – Home Visit Data Findings (2013).

See also CARE, *Lives Unseen: Urban 24. Syrian Refugees and Jordanian Host Communities Three Years into the Syrian Crisis* (April 2014).

25. Government of Jordan, *National Resilience Plan 2014 – 2016* (final draft 29 May 2014).

26. CARE, *Lives Unseen: Urban Syrian Refugees and Jordanian Host Communities Three Years into the Syrian Crisis* (April 2014). According to the shelter sector an estimated 355,000 (out of over 1.1 million registered) refugees have received some type of shelter assistance to date.

Lack of Security of Tenure

In Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan NRC has found that the majority of Syrian refugees face a lack of security of tenure in their housing arrangements and as a result risk eviction and homelessness. Not being able to secure shelter impacts their ability to access other services, keep their children in school and stay connected to their family and support networks.

In **Jordan**, a recent NRC study revealed that 70% of Syrian refugees do not have secure tenure with many renting without basic rental agreements. The lack of agreements leaves them vulnerable to forced eviction and further displacement.⁽²⁶⁾ Syrian refugee families assessed by NRC reported moving frequently in an attempt to secure affordable accommodation crucially impacting their ability to maintain their legal status as they are required to update their place of residence on government-issued service cards in order to access local services. In **Lebanon**, NRC recorded an increase in cases of mass forced eviction of refugees from informal settlements, especially those

perceived as becoming 'too permanent', as well as reports of higher rates of forced evictions of refugees from rental accommodation. Initial findings from a recent NRC assessment in Lebanon found that, like Jordan, the majority of Syrian refugees do not have secure tenure and that many are at risk of homelessness if they are evicted from their current shelter.⁽²⁸⁾ These risks are particular great amongst female-headed households.

In **KR-I**, findings from a Multi Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) stated that 76% of all Syrian refugees who live in non-camp settings in Erbil Governorate only have verbal agreements for their housing.⁽²⁹⁾ An NRC assessment in KR-I in April 2014 in neighbourhoods where the majority of the most vulnerable refugees reside, puts the figure closer to 98%. The MSNA also found that 21% of refugees in non-camp settings have moved at least once since arriving in KR-I, whether by choice, or due to forced eviction.



Jordanian landlord poses for a photo in an unfinished housing unit in Irbid, Jordan. (Georg Schaumberger / NRC)

27. NRC Jordan, NRC Shelter Project: Potential Expansion: Jerash & Ajloun (April 2014).

28. NRC Lebanon Information, Counseling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) Assessment. NRC field teams collected qualitative and quantitative data on Syrian refugees' access to HLP rights in the Central and North Bekaa valley. The goal of the assessment and data collection was twofold:

(1) to assess refugee needs; and (2) to monitor programme outcomes. (May 2014).

29. REACH Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, KR-I April 2014.

Towards More Sustainable Shelter Solutions in the Region

NRC's shelter strategy in the countries neighbouring Syria is working towards improving living conditions of Syrian refugees by: (1) increasing the housing stock available for the benefit of both Syrian and host community families; and (2) raising awareness about structural and regulatory issues that negatively impact the enjoyment of Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights of Syrian and host community tenants in neighbouring countries. These interventions provide lessons and learning which is relevant for the overall Syria crisis response.

Integrated Urban Shelter Response

Due to the rental market conditions in Lebanon, Jordan and KR-I and the increasing number of refugees seeking to access these markets, the provision of new, additional shelter spaces is a priority. NRC has focused on innovative solutions, which increase the available shelter stock by adding low-cost housing units to the market. This approach provides tangible support to host communities while meeting the needs of vulnerable refugees from Syria.

NRC shelter activities include upgrades and rehabilitation to existing buildings, which provide minimum-standard shelter to refugees as well as financial incentives and technical advice to local landlords to bring new housing units onto the rental market. Through its Integrated Urban Shelter response, NRC supports Lebanese, Jordanian and Iraqi families to host refugees from Syria by upgrading shelters to minimum standard in exchange

for a one to two year rent free stay for identified vulnerable refugee families from Syria.

Unlike other approaches, such as cash for rent, which can generate inflation in housing markets, NRC's approach contributes towards the creation of additional and much needed housing units. The development and increase of available and secure housing opportunities in local communities can help to stabilise rents and reduce competition within the market – the main concern facing refugees and host communities alike - and provides longer-term benefits to the neighbouring countries.

In Jordan, NRC estimates that the secured funding for 3,500 housing units will provide safe, adequate and secure shelter to more than 12,250 Syrian refugees for at least one year and in most instances 18 months. This will benefit the host community by increasing the value of the properties and injecting more than 8,75 million USD into the Jordanian economy through construction materials, labour costs, and other income generating opportunities.

Through its shelter programme, since mid-2013, NRC has provided shelter assistance to over 28,000 refugees from Syria in Lebanon, over 5,100 Syrian refugees in Jordan and 2,600 in KR-I.

“Many refugees who rent are increasingly unable to pay for the rising rental cost, which exposes them to risk of eviction”



Generic view of houses in the Aarsal area in Lebanon (Christian Jepsen / NRC)

Enjoyment of Housing Land and Property Rights

Through its Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme, NRC provides information, counselling and legal aid to refugees on Housing, Land and Property (HLP) issues.

Addressing HLP issues is fundamental to protection of displaced populations and also provides benefits to host community landlords and tenants.

In Lebanon and Jordan, in coordination with other humanitarian partners, NRC is setting up forced eviction monitoring frameworks and is researching barriers to increased tenure security in housing arrangements for refugees.

For example, a recent HLP assessment in Lebanon found that although written agreements contribute to improved security of tenure the top two reasons that refugees hesitate to clarify rental terms with written agreements is because they are afraid of approaching the landlord or refugee representative or are unaware of the benefits that written agreements can provide.⁽³⁰⁾

In Jordan, NRC outreach teams now conduct regular house visits to provide information and counselling to refugees as well as to monitor and support relations between landlords and tenants.

NRC's ongoing field analysis will be shared with humanitarian shelter working groups and donors to inform national humanitarian shelter responses.

By understanding the reasons for disputes between refugees and host communities, issues leading to forced evictions, and HLP rights of refugees, NRC is able to develop activities towards preventing and responding to forced evictions.

These include supporting refugee and host communities to address related disputes as well as improving the understanding and upholding of rights under local laws and customs in order to benefit refugee and host community families alike.

“By understanding the reasons for disputes between refugees and host communities, issues leading to forced evictions, and HLP rights of refugees, NRC is able to develop activities towards preventing and responding to forced evictions.”



Hala, in her home in a Palestinian gathering in South Lebanon. Her home was rehabilitated by NRC, which included building disabled access (Christian Jepsen / NRC)

NRC Response Looking Ahead

As shelter needs of refugees from Syria increase and mid-term solutions are required, NRC will continue to scale up its shelter programmes to assist refugees outside of formal camps in neighbouring countries. This will include exploring options for prolonging the hosting period, beyond the current one to two year period offered through NRC's Integrated Urban Shelter response. The scale-up will also be done by bringing other humanitarian partners on board, as well as seeking to attract development funding, which could allow for developing new modalities, such as accessing credit and mortgages. NRC will also continue to advocate with neighbouring countries on the need for broader long-term housing strategies that meet needs of Syrian refugees and host communities and set the framework for what has become a protracted refugee crisis.

NRC will also expand its HLP work in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. This will include mediating landlord-tenant disputes and longer term monitoring of shelter beneficiaries, collecting information on reasons leading to potential or actual evictions of refugees and researching types of agreements between landlords and tenants in the different socio, geographic and economic contexts. NRC will continue to develop methodologies to prevent forced evictions through raising awareness on legal agreements and supporting refugees and host communities to address disputes related to housing.⁽³¹⁾ NRC will also conduct research and provide analysis to humanitarian and development actors, donors and other stakeholders on structural and regulatory issues that impact the enjoyment

of HLP rights more broadly as well as specialist research on key areas such as HLP rights of women.



“The majority of refugees in countries neighbouring Syria live in urban settings among the host communities spread throughout villages, towns and cities”

31. Using Collaborative Dispute Resolution (CDR) mechanisms and methodologies.

NRC Recommendations:

All refugees fleeing from Syria should have access to shelter that meets internationally-recognised humanitarian standards and activities should prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable refugees, without discrimination.

The immense numbers of refugees that have sought refuge in neighbouring countries is placing a huge strain on the communities hosting refugees.

It is therefore important that host communities also receive assistance when they need it.

Moreover, the participation of the host communities at the time of defining the best shelter options for refugee populations at the local level is crucial in order to reduce currently damaged levels of acceptance and co-existence.

Recommendations to Humanitarian Donors:

- Increase parallel funding to scale up the humanitarian shelter response in non-camp settings in countries neighbouring Syria.
- Include HLP programmes as core parts of emergency shelter responses including monitoring forced evictions.
- Increase the percentage of funding to mutually benefit host community infrastructure in areas hosting large numbers of refugees such as schools, primary health care and other communal centres.

Recommendations to Development Donors:

- Fund sustainable, conflict-sensitive shelter programmes in countries neighbouring Syria that host large numbers of refugees, with a focus on programmes that increase national housing stock, support self-reliance and social cohesion and strengthen host community incentives so that they are able to continue hosting.
- Support host governments with technical expertise to further develop national housing strategies and plans at scale, which take into account the immediate needs of Syrian refugees and the impact on poor host communities.
- Ensure that national housing strategies include adequate components related to HLP research and address structural and regulatory barriers to the enjoyment of HLP rights.

Humanitarian Operational Shelter Actors:

- Focus on complementary activities, which add shelters to the overall national housing stock and adopt community-based approaches that support self-reliance.
- Respond to research on key regulatory and structural issues affecting HLP rights and ensure interventions are in line with national laws and customs.
- Coordinate to monitor forced evictions of both Syrian and host community tenants alike and include information campaigns as standard practices in shelter strategies.

The logo consists of the letters 'NRC' in white, bold, sans-serif font, set against a solid orange square background.

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