

Shelter sector strategy - 2013

Beirut, 18 December 2012



Working paper for 2013

1. Background

1.1. Numbers

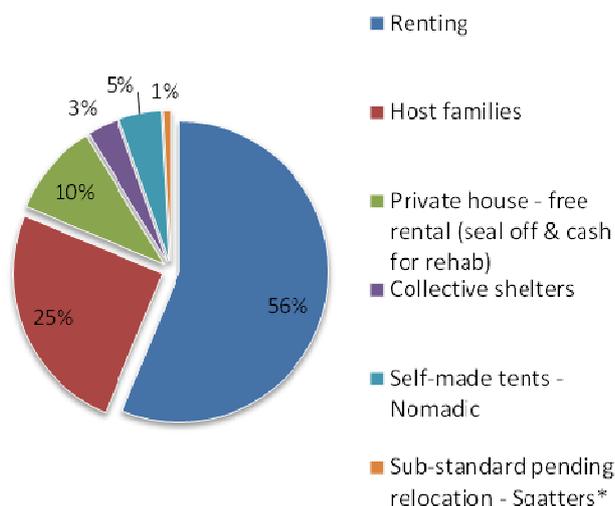
The influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon has significantly increased this year. From the first to the second half of 2012 there has been a shift from a small onset situation of 6,000 refugees in January, to an increasing movement of people across the border up to 25,000 in-country by July, to a much larger critical displacement of over 170,000 refugees expected by the end of the year (exceeding RRP3 figures).

For political and historical reasons, Lebanon had always had a very open policy towards Syrians' access to the Lebanese labour market. Consequently, the country hosts a large number of Syrian workers (permanent and seasonal), estimated at between 250,000 and 300,000 people.¹ These workers are typically single males without a family presence – however, this is radically changing. Due to the current situation in Syria, many workers in Lebanon are unable to return, remaining in Lebanon and bringing their families and relatives to join them in order to escape the conflict. This trend puts enormous pressure on shelter availability and shelter needs, since the shelter situation for male migrant workers may not fit that of families with children.

1.2. Patterns of displacement and shelter needs

As the situation deteriorates in Syria, the short period of displacement that refugees were initially expecting is now prolonged and refugees are preparing themselves for a longer stay in Lebanon. This may explain the shift from the initial location of Syrian refugees close to the border areas in the north (Akkar) and in the Bekaa Valley, to a movement towards urban areas on the coast and in the south of the country, where work opportunities can be found.

At the beginning of the influx in 2012, many refugees resided with host families, but this dynamic is coming to an end as the volume of refugees exceeds hosting capacities. Alternative solutions have been developed, such as accommodating refugees in unfinished houses and collective centres, but these solutions will soon be exhausted as well.



Shelter type graph - Source UNHCR – Dec. 2012

¹ There is an absence of official statistics and surveys on the Syrian workforce in Lebanon. Until the withdrawal of Syrian armed forces following the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister on 14 February 2005, and the massive rallies of the Cedar Revolution, the subject of Syrian migrant workers was considered to be very sensitive.

At this stage of the displacement, the majority of refugees rent their accommodation in urban areas.

The increase of refugees living in urban settings is clearly ongoing, particularly for those residing in Tripoli and Saida and, to a lesser extent, Beirut.² In urban areas, refugees face the problem of over-priced housing that is often of poor or sub-standard condition, or at times hazardous and dangerous for living. Sadly, in many cases some refugee families are unable to afford even sub-standard housing due to the fact that they have exhausted their personal resources. Out of desperation, many families are resorting to the illegal occupation of land or buildings, some of which are unsafe and/or unfit for living.

1.3. Government response

The Lebanese government has remained very open to the arrival of Syrian refugees but has opted for a “no camp policy”, objecting to any shelter options that could be perceived as such. The planned erection of tents or prefabricated small dwellings on private land has therefore not been possible. In this context, Operating Partners (OP) have addressed shelter needs with lengthier or more resource-consuming shelter interventions that may not always correspond to the expected responses for an emergency of this kind. One such example is the rehabilitation of houses or the completion of the construction of unfinished buildings.

For the specific case of spontaneous self-made settlements/tents - very common in the Bekaa Valley or in Akkar, currently numbering over 1,500 units, UNHCR and partners’ interventions have only been able to support non-visible structural improvements, such as insulation or sanitation, given the government policy of not permitting support to these structures.

The government has set up an inter-ministerial committee under the Prime Minister to develop a response plan and called upon the international community for funding. Government response has been developed through extensive exchanges with UNHCR.

The Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) has been appointed by the Prime Minister to become the government interface with the UNHCR. MOSA is recruiting staff including a shelter expert to implement the response plan as well as representing MOSA in inter-agency shelter meetings.

1.4. Impact on hosting communities

The large influx of Syrian refugees during the second half of 2012 has begun to have an economic and social impact on Lebanese residents. Among the negative effects are excess demand of affordable housing, excess supply of unskilled labour (and therefore downward pressure on wages), and increased pressure on the already fragile labour and real estate markets.

Public infrastructure, such as water, sanitation and electricity, are under additional pressure. In the urban centres of Tripoli and Saida, slum areas or tented settlements in the city peripheries are seen as cheaper options for refugees and are growing.

2. Assumptions and projected needs in 2013

2.1. Numbers

The recent arrival trend is expected to continue such that by the end of 2012, 170,000 Syrian refugees will be registered or pending registration with UNHCR, increasing to some 300,000 by mid-2013.

² Tripoli and Saida do have large Sunni populations as per the accounts of the large majority of Syrian refugees.

Moreover, given the current escalation of hostilities in Syria, particularly in and around Damascus, the possibility of massive influx should be taken seriously.

2.2. Shelter availability

Whether the Lebanese housing market can cope with the increased demand from Syrian refugees - now and into 2013 - remains a crucial question. If the issue of availability is separated from the capacity to pay (on the part of the refugees), then the market should be able to accommodate the increasing number of refugees in 2013; it has substantial capacities. During the 2006 conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah militia, for instance, over a million people were displaced for several weeks and all of them found some form of accommodation. In addition to NGOs being very active in completing houses for refugee accommodation, landlords are capitalising on the increase in demand for housing and are quickly building accommodation and/or converting sub-standard shelters into housing.

2.3. Ability to pay rent

The main challenge lies in the limited capacity of refugees to pay rent. In Lebanon's cities, Islamic organizations have given substantial assistance to refugees to support rental payments, but this has been poorly captured by the coordination structure. A key question here is whether these agencies will continue providing support, how many families they are capable of supporting, and for how long they will have capacity to provide this support.

For these reasons, supporting Syrian refugees to pay rent constitutes a major option for 2013. A cash-for-rent or unconditional cash assistance program that targets vulnerable cases could form a key part of the assistance program.



2.4. Government engagement

More than in any other location, the involvement of municipalities in planning for and responding to the shelter needs of urban refugees is essential. Only municipalities have the legitimacy needed to perform a number of important shelter-related tasks, such as providing authorisation for the occupation of public buildings. City authorities are also better placed to help in the identification of housing capacity and the available stock of shelter, to liaise with landlords, and to ensure the provision of public services to refugee community centres. However, it is also understood that some municipalities in Lebanon are handicapped by a lack of means and low staff capacity.

These factors, together with the growing influx into Lebanon, will greatly impact the shelter situation and the shelter needs of Syrian refugees in 2013.

3. Objective of the shelter sector response in 2013

Objective of the shelter sector: Ensure adequate shelter solutions are available for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.³

Target: 100% of refugees in need have access to a facility that protects them from external elements (both weather and threats against their personal security) on a daily basis.

Indicator: number of households living in adequate shelters.



4. Targets and response for 2012

The projected caseload of Syrian refugees is estimated at 300,000 persons or 60,000 families by June 2013.

It is assumed that over 40% of these (meaning 120,000 refugees or 20,000 families) will be in need of some kind of shelter solution.

In addition to identifying the number of refugees who need shelter, it is important to determine what form of shelter is needed. Different solutions have to be provided, ranging from cash-for-shelter to shelter rehabilitation.

Nine priority recommendations for the shelter response follow:

4.1. Increase shelter capacity to welcome new families

Facing a large influx of new refugees, it is essential that all efforts be made to expand shelter capacity to receive new refugees. This can be achieved by:

- Expanding capacity in the host community; and/or
- Completing unfinished houses on plots of land of host communities or those without landlords, and rehabilitating host houses in exchange for free rental for a limited period of time;
- Increasing the number of collective centres in public or private buildings, including rehabilitation of buildings and renting private ones;
- Erecting semi-permanent shelters adjacent to host or collective centers;
- Providing cash for shelter to support families in paying their rent or finding an accommodation for rent.

OPs believe that shelter capacity is still available from unfinished houses in the Bekaa but that this will be depleted at some stage. To date, not all areas in the Bekaa have been explored for shelter potential.

4.2. Increase Collective Centers capacity

It is also crucial to continue to establish collective center in Lebanon to accommodate new families or for protection cases.

In 2013, the focus will be on increasing shelter capacity in the more recent refugee-hosting urban areas, particularly Tripoli, but also on the expansion of capacity in the Bekaa and Akkar provinces. Private buildings for rent will also be considered.

³ The shelter group was dissatisfied with the objective of “Shelter and infrastructure improved”, as proposed and indicated in the RRP3, as it does not reflect the context and the range of response of the shelter interventions. Improvement is not quantifiable and measurable, and the objective did not incorporate a quality approach.

4.2.1 Shelter capacity

These shelters should provide temporary and/or longer-term solutions for the most vulnerable new arrivals, for women and children at risk, and for cases in need of urgent relocation from unsafe areas or hazardous dwellings. Although the shelters will be only available for a limited number of refugees, they represent a critical means of providing an immediate solution to urgent protection cases.

Protected areas will be created in collective centres when possible to accommodate vulnerable cases or SGBV survivors. It is important that clear criteria for eligibility are applied to ensure that protection cases have access.

4.2.2. Collective center management capacity

Reinforcement of collective shelter management is an important priority in 2013, including identification of local partners, training on collective center management, allocation of resources.

4.3. Emergency intervention – Ensure that refugee shelters are insulated from the elements and have access to sanitation

Weatherproofing as basic emergency interventions, is to be considered as a life-saving intervention and should continue and be prioritised in the first months of 2013 in order to ensure that refugee families are living in shelter protected from the elements. This requires that such shelters are winterised and have access to water and sanitation.

Water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) access is essential and is a basic need to fulfil even within weatherproofing interventions. In cases where it is not possible to provide any access to sanitation, relocation and alternative solutions - such as cash-for-shelter or rooms in collective centres - should be proposed.

4.4. Improve conditions of sub-standard shelters, through repairs, weather-proofing interventions and safety standards

Many refugees rent accommodation types that are considered sub-standard, such as unfinished houses with poor sanitation, ventilation or lights, or shelters that lack minimum safety standards and put adults and/or children at risk.

Very often, shelters are not insulated to protect families against the elements. Upgrading refugee accommodation to reach basic standards and permit decent living conditions for refugee families is the minimum goal of any shelter intervention.

The agreement baseline with the owner is a significant upgrade of refugees' living premises in exchange of free rent for a fixed duration . These activities are usually completed on through two to four weeks.

4.5. Expand cash-for-shelter or unconditional cash assistance

The increase of cash-for-shelter assistance or unconditional cash assistance is planned as a key response for 2013 in order to address the needs of refugees who require rental support.

The current assumption is that at least 50% of Syrian refugee families will continue to rent their accommodation in 2013. Therefore, over 150,000 people or 30,000 families may be renting accommodation by July 2013.

However, it is also possible that the situation in 2013 may evolve along a different trajectory to that of 2012, as it is expected that the job market will be saturated but the need for housing will continue to increase.

4.5.1. Two categories of beneficiaries will need to be taken into consideration

The most vulnerable cases registered in the UNHCR database that are not able to work and who will need some kind of support in order to pay their rent. According to UNHCR statistics, this category represents 30% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

The caseload of those who have lost their job or who cannot find work due to the saturation of the market will fall under the vulnerable families' category for the purpose of assistance.

4.5.2. Overall risks to take into consideration and recommendations

The risk of a price increase in the real estate market as a result of the increase in Syrian refugees' demand for housing, meaning that cash-for-shelter or unconditional cash support may be insufficient for families to find accommodation.

- Recommendation: Review of the market situation on a regular basis, conduct household economic surveys and adaptation of the cash amount.

The risk that host families, who were previously hosting refugee families for free, may no longer be willing to do so if others are receiving rent through a cash-for-shelter program.

- Recommendation: Consider cash support to host families.

The risk of interruption of shelter support payment. It is currently expected that Syrian refugees will stay in Lebanon for a prolonged, albeit temporary, period. Would donors be willing to commit to cash-for-rent programs for this length of time?

- Recommendation: Advocate to donors on this matter.

4.6. Develop contingency and preparedness in case of massive influx of refugees

A massive influx of refugees is highly likely and needs to be taken seriously.

The Lebanese government and MOSA are working on contingency planning and preparedness in case of the crisis leads to a massive influx. The identification of a site upon which to set up a camp is underway.

In parallel to government preparation for camp planning, UNHCR and its IP are also looking into contingency planning in case there is a continuous rise in the refugee influx and also in case the planned response of establishing a camp does not take place in a timely manner.

Cash-for-shelter may not be a realistic response in the situation of an emergency with a large caseload of refugees due to the time constraints involved in identifying adequate shelter for rent. If host family and public place options are exhausted, then collective centres or temporary shelters may be the only alternative solution.

4.6.1. Preparation for a possible massive refugee influx, the following options are proposed:

Contingencies for increased influx and emergency response thus need to be identified and a stock of shelter options prepared that could support thousands of refugees in a window of a few hours. Such options should include rehabilitated and winterised public or private buildings, temporary shelter (tents, shelter box) that could be located inside warehouses or factories – indeed any large structure so long as there is a roof and concrete floor.

4.6.2. Concrete steps to proceed

- Comprehensive identification of all available public and private buildings, including warehouses, convents, etc;
- Involvement of municipalities and agreement to the use of identified buildings or spaces;
- Rehabilitation of buildings to develop a stock of identified/repared buildings, ready to receive new people;
- Reception centre put in place;

- Preparation of a stock of tents and NFI including stoves and blankets;
- Planning for the management of these collective centres;
- Planning for the transportation of refugees to collective centres;
- Training and preparedness with volunteer groups (Red Cross).

4.7. Information collection – Expertise support and evaluation -Training for OPs

To enhance the shelter response of operating partners, training on cash modalities is advised, together with an exchange of expertise and knowledge between the Lebanon case and cases such as Jordan and the Kenya/Somalia experience.

Training on collective centre management will certainly be of outmost importance.

Information on Syrian refugees collected at the time of registration offers some data on the situation of families and their vulnerability. However, this needs to be enhanced by further surveys in order to record the pattern of displacement and the living conditions of refugees.

Different responses and approaches within Lebanon shelter interventions have been implemented in 2012. It would be useful for external evaluators to review the different intervention modalities in order to identify effective intervention and confirm operation modalities for replication.

The large presence of refugees in urban areas is a new trend all around the world. Refugees have specific needs and there are several issues linked to their presence in urban areas. Technical support from research organisations would help to identify gaps and improve responses and interventions.

4.8. Coordination and mapping

The UNHCR shelter and winterization program aims to provide emergency assistance and relief NFIs to refugees to help them meet their basic and essential needs and to be protected against the elements. Many aid actors are implementing such assistance.

UNHCR and MOSA will continue to support the coordination of all actors in the shelter sector but in addition will increase the link to non-traditional actors and attempt to collate information on their interventions - see next point.

Mapping shelter response is a key for the sector coordination on national and local level.

4.9. Develop an online database tracking tool

As the lead agency, UNHCR has the mandate to collect all information related to assistance provided to refugees. The UNHCR Beirut office is developing a new online data-tracking tool to capture this information.

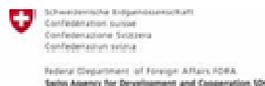
Management of collective centres and real time information on shelter capacity and availability will be developed and available.

It is understood that the adequate collection of information from all aid agencies is crucial for good planning and targeting, whilst bolstering the efficiency of the international and national aid response. However, to date this goal has proved challenging. Implementing partners and traditional operators are requested to provide regular information online as to their achievements and plans.

For other actors, such as donor agencies from the Gulf countries, Islamic charities, political parties and local initiatives, the promotion of different approaches to centralized coordination is proposed in order to make the case for information-sharing and collecting, particularly where the data will be entered on behalf of these organizations. Ultimately, the provision of training for national actors and the translation of the tracking tool portal into Arabic are planned.

5. Shelter Sector Agencies

Thanks to the following agencies for their contributions to this document:



For additional information, please contact

Alain Robyns

UNHCR Lebanon Shelter Project Manager

robyns@unhcr.org