

UN INTER-AGENCY RESPONSE

UPDATE

Highlights of the month:

- UNHCR registered 14,000 refugees this month – bringing the total number of Syrian refugees registered and seeking to be registered to 80,482. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC), UNICEF, World Vision (WV), Caritas Migrant Center and the World Food Programme (WFP) distributed food vouchers, food kits, hygiene and baby kits to over 40,000 people (8,000 families) this month;
- The WFP introduced the food voucher system for the first time in Tripoli;
- The Lebanese government issued an order to prevent Syrians from being returned to Syria;
- UNHCR and partners are advocating for the necessary government authorization to move forward on shelter renovations of vacant public premises;
- The United Nations and its humanitarian partners issued a third revised regional appeal on Thursday September 28 for US\$487.8 million, including US\$106 million to support Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Registration/Numbers

Over 80,400 Syrians are receiving protection and assistance in Lebanon through the efforts of the Government of Lebanon and UN and NGO partners. Of this number, 56,947 are registered, with an additional 23,535 people having been in contact with UNHCR to be registered. This marks an increase of over 23,000 refugees since August.

Yet access to Lebanon remains dangerous, with reported difficulties leaving Syria that include, security checks, demands for bribes, landmines in key border areas and an inability for women and children to cross. Furthermore, once crossing into Lebanon, many settle into border areas which are subjected to a particularly precarious security situation. Villages in Wadi Khaled and Akkar continue to be shelled regularly, and this month, Aarsal

in the Bekaa region was also affected by cross-border incursions

On average, 450 people register daily at the Tripoli registration centre in the North, and some 300-370 are registering in the Bekaa through a mobile registration unit currently set up in Baalbeck.

In North Lebanon, 32,000 refugees (6,921 families) have registered with UNHCR, with close to 12,000 registered since the Tripoli centre opened August 14. The majority of individuals continue to come from Homs, Idlib and Hama. Recently, refugees from Damascus have entered through the Masnaa border in east Lebanon and settled in the North where they have family ties.

In the Bekaa there are 23,416 registered refugees (approximately 4,680 families). Most fled violence in Damascus, Homs and Aleppo.

UNHCR SEPTEMBER 2012



An additional 1,519 refugees are registered in Beirut and South Lebanon. An assessment mission to identify a mobile center in Saida was successful; preparations are underway to reach out to the estimated 10,000 people awaiting registration in the South.

The registration response continues along a three-pronged strategy: the main focus will remain on registration at fixed centers, which ensures a quicker, more efficient and sustainable process. Currently, UNHCR operates fixed centers in Beirut and in Tripoli, and is currently identifying a center in the Bekaa. For those refugees who are unable to access the registration centers, UNHCR is collaborating with NGOs and local partners to facilitate their transport. In North Lebanon this week, 162 individuals were transported from border towns to Tripoli for registration, with the support of local authorities. In addition, mobile registration missions, to South Lebanon, Wadi Khaled, and the Bekaa, are being planned to reach refugees who continue to face protection or mobility concerns.

As the number of refugees approaching UNHCR has grown, the demands on registration have increased. Capacity to register in a timely manner is being strengthened.

As is the case in many refugee circumstances, some persons flee suddenly without being able to collect their documents. In the current situation, most refugees carry documents. For those who do not, UNHCR conducts interviews to ensure that these persons were indeed displaced due to the conflict in Syria before registering them. This helps us ensure the integrity of our programme and prevent fraud.

Protection

With the increasing number of refugees entering Lebanon, UNHCR and partner agencies are thoroughly monitoring and addressing the wide range of protection needs among the displaced community.

Over 70 percent of registered refugees cross officially, with the remaining entering through unofficial border points. This prohibits them from moving freely and increases their risk of arrest for being within the country without authorization. UNHCR is advocating for the regularization of registered refugees who have entered through unofficial border points and follows-up regularly on cases of arrest for illegal entry or stay. Most Syrians who are arrested for illegal entry or stay have been released. The Office, however, is still not given full access to Syrians detained at the GSO retention facilities who expressed the wish to meet with UNHCR. This policy is of concern and UNHCR is raising the issue in its advocacy with authorities. The Lebanese government recently issued an order to prevent Syrians from being forcibly returned to Syria, which is positive news.

Additionally, those who enter legally are now able to renew their permits within Lebanon, a significant achievement since previously it was necessary to return to Syria to do so. However, the cost of \$200 is prohibitive and UNHCR is seeking to waive this fee.

With 78 per cent of refugees in Lebanon being women and children, addressing child protection issues are of utmost concern. In the North, UNHCR, UNICEF, the DRC, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Social Movement met to identify specific child protection needs and the inter-agency response. Gaps in child protection include an absence of

specialized clinical care for children, lack of a child psychologist in the field (as well as qualified social workers) and no common database for sharing information. UNICEF received reports of street children in Beirut and an increased number of refugee children involved in hazardous labor. In the Bekaa, gaps in Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) assistance, shelter and counseling, like in the North, were identified as major protection concerns. Agencies are working to accelerate and expand services to children and prevention and response mechanisms regarding GBV.

Registration and distribution exercises are also being used to identifying those with specific needs and refer them to specialized partners for assistance.

To help assist newly arrived refugees who have not yet been registered DRC provides non-food items while the WFP will distribute food parcels via door-to-door efforts. Caritas is also assisting by providing food coupons to unregistered refugees in Tripoli. So far, 450 people (90 families) have been assisted through these projects since the beginning of September.

Distribution

A new system is in place whereby every registered refugee receives a text message or phone call informing them about the time and place for the next round of distribution. A coordinated response that included DRC, UNICEF, World Vision, Caritas and WFP distributed food vouchers, food kits, hygiene and baby kits to over 40,000 people (8,000 families) this month.

Meanwhile newly arrived and not yet registered refugees are receiving support

from various agencies including DRC, Caritas and WFP.

In an effort to streamline assistance across the country, WFP recently introduced the food voucher system for the first time in Tripoli this week. This system, first implemented in Bekaa, gives refugees more food choice while reinforcing the local economy. Challenges with the system are been addressed. For example, some local shops reported encountering counterfeited vouchers, while some refugees complained about inflated prices at local grocery shops. DRC has since provided local shops with UV lights enabling them to discern counterfeited vouchers and WFP is in the process of conducting individual interviews with local shops to ensure their compliance to the initially agreed-upon code of conduct. WFP is also working to expand its programme to reach Lebanese who have recently returned from Syria, and include additional grocery shops as part of the food voucher system in an effort to further capacitate the local economy. The expansion of the WFP programme to Lebanese depends upon approval from the government.

Another challenge faced with distribution this month is the fact that some refugee families relocated to different villages within the Bekaa, Wadi Khaled, Akkar or Tripoli areas without informing the concerned agencies. Some showed-up to distribution sites in their new location where their names do not figure on partners' refugee lists. This triggered unexpected overcrowding in some distribution sites and forced agencies to reschedule their plans for protection and security reasons. Partner agencies are now conducting second rounds of distribution within the same month to avoid such occurrences as well

as to assist those who could potentially fall through the cracks, including families who have relocated to a new village and newly registered refugees.

Education

September 24 marked the start of the new school year, and enrolment continues to progress. There are more than 3,000 refugee students enrolled in schools, assisted by UNHCR, UNICEF and SCI. In total, there are 15,000 school aged children being targeted for enrolment.

While most school directors are working to integrate refugee children, some are reluctant to engage Syrian youth into the Lebanese education system. Additionally, even though Lebanese public schools will be admitting Syrian students, their capacity is limited. UNICEF is looking at means to address these capacity issues with other agencies.

Meanwhile, efforts continue to encourage refugee parents to enroll their children, while providing transportation to neighboring villages should the capacity of local schools be filled as well as potentially offering double shifts of classes. Some parents do not readily accept the importance of education for their children or feel they children must work in order to help their families. UNHCR and partners engaged in information campaigns throughout the summer, and will continue to do so to ensure all refugee families are aware of the immense benefits of educating their children and to address some of the economic pressures that families face.

Additionally, UNHCR and the DRC opened their first community centre at the Ministry of Social Affairs' (MoSA)

Social Development Center (SDC) in Amayer, Wadi Khaled. Partner agencies including SCI, UNICEF, and the International Medical Corps (IMC) will provide hair dressing and sewing vocational classes. Health awareness sessions aiming to improve the refugees' living standards and livelihood will also be provided. Furthermore, MoSA will use the platform to provide counseling and support to people with disabilities.

Health

Ensuring access to primary health care also remains important, especially with the challenges faced in providing vaccinations and medications in addition to maintaining a solid capacity of staff at the primary health care centres. UNHCR and partners provided training to staff at these centres, while medical mobile units rotated throughout the North and Bekaa reaching out to those who are unable to travel to centres for assistance.

Finding a solution to the pending issue of secondary health care coverage remained a top priority this month. The newly revised regional refugee response plan appealed for fresh funding, part of which can be allocated to covering the gaps in secondary health care. In the Bekaa, Dar al Fatwa notified hospitals that they will no longer be contributing to the remaining 15% of fees, which is normally left for the patient to pay. UNHCR and the International Medical Corps are reaching out to other local NGOs to help relieve this burden on beneficiaries.

Shelter

Shelter is a chronic concern. Presently 55 per cent of refugees are renting accommodation, 40 per cent are with hosting families, while less than per cent live in collective shelters.

UNHCR is working hard with NRC, DRC partners and local and national authorities to ensure that refugees can find appropriate accommodation, that landlords do not charge excessive rent; that the homes of host families get needed improvements, that we can move forward on renovations for collective shelters and that we can provide municipalities with prefabricated small single family dwellings to help accommodate a growing number of refugees.

With the growing number of refugees and the upcoming winter season, shelter continues to pose one of the biggest protection challenges. This month, UNHCR, DRC, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and partners have successfully been able to provide shelter solutions to over 800 people (160 families) living in active schools in the North and the Bekaa. Together with local actors, these agencies are working to identify adequate rental options, vacant buildings to renovate, as well as prefabricated dwellings to host single families. More importantly, UNHCR and partners are advocating for the necessary government authorization to move forward in these areas.

Regional Response Plan III

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners issued a revised appeal today for US\$487.8 million. The “Regional Response Plan for Syrian Refugees” outlines the plans of 52 humanitarian organizations, led by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), to help the rapidly increasing numbers of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey.

Whereas the March appeal projected an estimated 40,000 Syrians becoming

refugees in Lebanon by the end of 2012 (a number that was surpassed in July), this appeal provides for assistance to the present number as well as possible new arrivals until the end of the year.

The Lebanon response plan, totally 106 million, and involving the work of over 25 partners is only 20% funded at this time.