

UN Inter-Agency Response for Syrian Refugees

Beirut, 05 October – 12 October 2012



Highlights of the week

- 94,000 refugees are currently receiving assistance through UNHCR and partners, over 64,000 of whom are registered with UNHCR;
- Over 4,000 refugees were registered with the Office this week;
- Over 9,000 refugees received food vouchers from WFP and hygiene and baby kits, and blankets by UNHCR, DRC, World Vision, Caritas Migrant Center, UNICEF, and UNFPA;
- Understandings were reached with the Office of the General Security on a number of issues;
- The Ministry of Education and Higher Education announced that it will provide free books to all children attending the public schools and continues to facilitate the enrolment of Syrian refugee children;
- UNHCR and partners commenced the distribution of winter blankets as part of the winterization programme.



Registration and New Arrivals

94,000 Syrians are receiving protection and assistance in Lebanon through the efforts of the Government of Lebanon and UN and NGO partners. Of this number, 64,836 are registered, with just under 30,000 people having been in contact with UNHCR to be registered.

UNHCR registered over 4,000 refugees this week at its centres in Tripoli, Aarsal, and Beirut.

Current distribution of registered population is as follows:

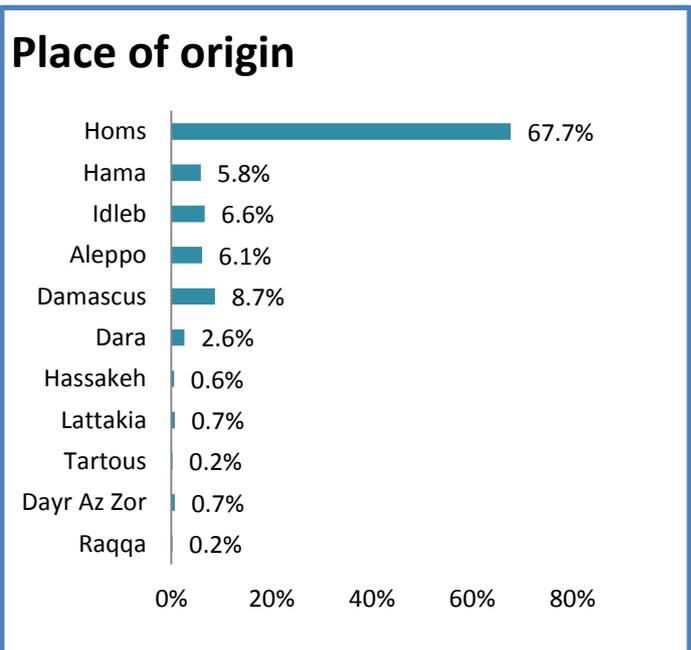
North Lebanon: 35,474

Bekaa: 27,320

Beirut: 1,797

The majority of individuals have come from Homs, Hama, Idleb, Aleppo, and Damascus.

Most registered Syrians this week entered through unofficial border crossings. The official border at Joucy has been closed for the past three months which has contributed to the movement of refugees through unofficial border crossing points. It is also clear from the testimony of many refugees in Aarsal who arrived from Homs, that they sought access to Lebanon through the closest border point as they were fearful of traveling further afield. In the North, there were reports of children denied authorization on the Syrian side to cross into Lebanon through official borders points.



As numbers have not abated, UNHCR is expanding its registration abilities. Centralized registration in Tripoli continues and mobile registration in Wadi Khaled will resume later this month. Meanwhile, Syrians in Wadi Khaled and Akroum who are awaiting registration have been given priority appointments. Mobile registration in the Bekaa will continue in Aarsal through next week.

Registration in south Lebanon is scheduled to commence on October 22 through Caritas' premises in Ghazieh, Sidon. Initial estimates by UNHCR and partners suggest that 13,000 Syrians are waiting to be registered in South Lebanon.

Protection

UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA and partners are coordinating to set up Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) services to strengthen the response to SGBV survivors.

According to a recent UNFPA study on reproductive health and Gender-Based Violence (GBV), many Syrian women are exposed to violence, including from their partners, and as many as 74 per cent then repeat this behavior by beating their children as a way of dealing with the difficult circumstances they face. Scaling up psychosocial

activities will help address this worrying issue. UNHCR and partners are devising a GBV data sharing system to harmonize data and help facilitate a coordinated response.

Also of concern are a few reports of the arrival of Syrian children who were not accompanied by their parents. Faced with obstacles on the Syrian side to cross at official border points, an increasing number of parents are entrusting their children with non-family members to get them to safety in Lebanon for a fee.

Discussions with the GSO this week have resulted in smoother procedures for UNHCR access to Syrians detained at the GSO retention centre. Meanwhile, all Syrian cases which were referred to UNHCR have been released from the centre.

Security

The continued shelling from Syrian territory into Lebanon is having a serious and negative impact on refugees and host Lebanese living in border areas. In the North, DRC visited families in Abboudiyeh following shelling earlier in the week. Reports of defected Syrian Army members crossing the Abboudiyeh border prompted heavy shooting from the Syrian side, damaging houses in border villages and forcing many families to flee to neighboring villages.

Shelling also affected the Wadi al Hawa and Tfeil areas in the Bekaa. Luckily there were no injuries or casualties in either north or east Lebanon, but UNHCR and partners are concerned that repeated shelling will continue to put refugees at risk and traumatize both Syrian and local Lebanese communities.

Distribution

Distribution efforts are expanding to include materials to help refugees through the cold winter months, as well as to address the needs of an increasing refugee population and new arrivals waiting to be registered.

In the Bekaa, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and World Vision (WV) distributed winter blankets. Distribution of other non-food items, such as hygiene and baby kits, as well as World Food Programme (WFP) food vouchers continue across Lebanon and in conjunction with the winterization items being distributed.

Unfortunately due to recent security concerns including shelling in north Lebanon, only a limited number of refugees attended distribution exercises in Akroum this week. Many assumed assistance efforts were halted in Akkar and instead went to Halba, where they received the needed assistance. Over 3,500 people (724 families) were assisted. UNHCR will continue to communicate with refugees during times of intense security incidents to ensure that refugees know where the safest place to receive assistance is and when exercises are taking place.

In Tripoli, Caritas Migrant Center is assisting new arrivals with food and non-food items while also conducting home visits to assess additional needs, such as providing cash to landlords to host families struggling to pay rent and the provision of clothing, shoes and mattresses for families arriving with none.

While official registration hasn't commenced yet in south Lebanon, some refugees are receiving distribution assistance through Caritas. Global Medics and Mine Action Group (MAG) will provide 600 hygiene kits to assist refugees in the South in coordination with UNHCR.

Education

UNHCR and partners continued to enroll children in schools while discussing options on how best to accommodate the large number of newly arrived families.

The MOEHE continues to work concertedly to ensure that children are enrolled in school by ensuring its public schools accept refugee children. Moreover, it has also agreed to provide books to both Lebanese and Syrian children. UNHCR and partners were previously providing refugees with books and will now allocate the extra funding toward gas to heat schools during winter which is very much needed. Tuition fees, school uniforms and supplies will continue to be provided by UNHCR and partners. This week, UNICEF distributed educational supplies in Hermel to 750 children after which local school directors and administrators held orientation sessions on how best to utilize the materials.

The MOEHE has also confirmed that it will provide health personnel, trained by UNHCR, UNICEF and Save the Children International (SCI), to monitor vulnerable children. This will ensure that children with specific needs are identified and referred to the appropriate partners for assistance.

As enrolment progresses, a range of measures are being discussed on means to integrate refugee children into the Lebanese public school system. One is to refer students to schools in nearby areas where there is available capacity. Another option is for UNICEF to provide school equipment and materials to schools with vacant rooms, such as administrative offices not in use, to build additional classroom space. Second shifts are also a possibility in areas where schools are full. This is being explored with MOEHE namely in Aarsal due to the large numbers of refugees in the area and also because transportation to schools in adjacent areas will not be feasible in the winter as Aarsal is deeply affected by snow and harsh weather.

Health

Health assistance is expanding across Lebanon to meet the needs of the increasing refugee population, despite funding gaps.

There are a growing number of refugees approaching UNHCR and the International Medical Corps (IMC) for psychosocial assistance. The majority of cases are people suffering from depression and anxiety, effects of the trauma caused by conflict and displacement. Services are available for psychological and psychiatric counseling.

Primary health care continues to be provided in the Bekaa through medical mobile units (MMU) and through Primary Health Care centres in the North. Medecins sans Frontieres will have a new MMU operating in Baalbeck and is coordinating with IMC, who already has two MMUs operating in the area, to ensure assistance isn't duplicated.

In south Lebanon, local public health centres have granted refugees access to their services, however these centres lack the resources and staff to fully assist all refugees in the South. Many live in remote areas and have difficulty traveling to hospitals and centres for help. UNHCR and partners are coordinating to properly address these needs.

Additionally, UNFPA is providing reproductive health care kits and training primary health care workers on reproductive health and GBV to further develop the health programme in the South. International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) is supporting pre- and post-natal care and delivery services in west Bekaa.

Funding gaps continue to challenge UNHCR and partners in covering all those in need. Dar al Fatwa stopped assisting with medication coverage in the Bekaa; UNHCR and IMC are meeting with Islamic Relief and the Arab Medical Union in order to fill this gap. There is also a reported lack of ambulances which is problematic for transporting urgent cases in the Bekaa. UNHCR is now liaising with specialized partners to address this pressing need.

Shelter

The provision of adequate shelter is a persistent concern, compounded by continued new arrivals; a lack of available rentals; economic and social pressures in the relatively poor areas where refugees have congregated; and difficulties in obtaining approval to use and rehabilitate empty buildings and vacant land. While Lebanese communities have generously welcomed their Syrian neighbours, that generosity alone will not meet all the needs as the refugee population grows and the winter months approach.

UNHCR, DRC, and NRC and other partners' winterisation plan in Lebanon is aimed at: ensuring the growing refugee population has accommodation; that the accommodation provides sufficient protection from the cold; and that refugees have enough fuel, warm clothing and other non-food aid items to get through the winter.

For the provision of accommodation, the program includes cash rental assistance; renovations to the homes of host families; provision of unfinished buildings and collective shelters for up to; transitional shelters for those in urgent need, and pre-fabricated shelters.

To ensure all accommodation is safe and secure against the elements, winterizing homes continues through a variety of activities that include roofing of unfinished houses; provision of shelter kits and labour (if required) to winterize sub-standard dwellings; and winterizing tents for refugees living in nomadic tented settlements.

To ensure that refugees have enough non-food aid supplies to get through the cold months, heating fuel; heaters and cooking stoves; winter blankets; and vouchers for the purchase of winter clothing are planned with this week seeing the widespread distribution of blankets.

The shelter programme is costly and a shortage of funds will deeply affect the coverage agencies are able to provide. UNHCR and partners continue to seek donor support for the shelter programme.