



Syrian refugee children top one million

Lebanon hosts largest number of child refugees

BEIRUT, 23rd August 2013 – The number of Syrian children registered as refugees topped one million today, according to UNHCR and UNICEF. Marking a fourfold increase since January this year, some 350,000 children are registered in Lebanon today - the largest number of Syrian refugee children in any neighbouring country.

Many children have survived violence, loss of family members and long, dangerous journeys to reach the safety of Lebanon. Obtaining food, water, medicines and shelter is a daily struggle for many refugee children and their families in Lebanon.

“This massive number of children cannot be ignored,” said Ninette Kelley, UNHCR Representative in Lebanon. “Most arrive with nothing. We are working around the clock to support families who rely on us to survive.”

“With survival so precarious, many children from Syria are being deprived of an education - and consequently, of a future,” said UNICEF Lebanon’s Representative Annamaria Laurini. “Access to education or continuous learning is fundamental for children to have a sense of normalcy in a safe environment, and to have opportunities for intellectual and emotional development.”

Reaching the hundreds of thousands of children out of school before the end of the year will be a huge challenge. Most do not currently receive any education. Despite the efforts of relief agencies and the generosity of the Ministry of Education, only 35,000 out of the over 300,000 Syrian school-age refugee children are currently enrolled in public schools. With thousands of children arriving to Lebanon every week, the capacity of the educational infrastructure is saturated.

UNHCR, UNICEF and their partners have made significant progress in raising the number of children attending education programs in Lebanon, also offering accelerated learning programs and remedial classes to over 45,000 children. The agencies have plans to reach an additional 245,000 children from refugee and vulnerable host Lebanese communities with

educational support throughout the country, including in the hundreds of informal tented settlements, before the end of the year. For many children, staying in school will be a struggle, with competing needs of family survival and insecure shelter.

“Children are among the most vulnerable and affected by the ongoing conflict”, said UNICEF’s Laurini. “The sheer caseload of children arriving to Lebanon with severe psychosocial distress due to the violence they have witnessed or experienced is overwhelming. Especially at risk are the thousands that have been separated from their families and have lost relatives in the conflict.”

In response, aid organizations have managed to deliver psycho-social support to over 85,000 affected children, but the needs are much higher. Psychosocial support and safe shelters are being offered to child victims of violence or child labour, who are also supported in their reintegration into schools.

UNHCR is also particularly concerned with the risk of statelessness faced by many Syrian children born in Lebanon, unless their births are registered. Birth registration is a complicated process. An estimated 10,000 new-born children will be registered as refugees by the end of 2013.

“Without birth certificates thousands of children are at risk of statelessness, which leads to a life of insecurity and denial of access to basic rights such as healthcare and education and vulnerability to abuse and exploitation,” said Kelley. “We are working closely with the Government of Lebanon and national partners to facilitate access to birth registration for Syrian refugees.”

Lebanon hosts the largest number of registered refugees in the region, over 680,000. By the end of 2013, one in four people living in Lebanon will be a Syrian refugee, while the US\$1.7 billion joint inter-agency and government appeal launched to address the needs of Syrian refugees and host communities in Lebanon is currently only 26 per cent funded.

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